Discovering

ISLAM

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This book is dedicated to the master of all women from the beginning of creation to the end, Lady Fatima al-Zahra (peace be upon her), beloved daughter of Prophet Muhammad ibn Abdullah (peace be upon him and his family), as we await her intercession on the final day.

Author's Note

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

Discovering Islam is an invitation to learn about the fundamental message, spirit, and practice of Islam. This book covers an array of essential concepts, practices, and beliefs. It takes you through the core principle of the Oneness of God to the most contemporary concept of *jihad*.

The message of Islam is universal. Islam is not intended to be a faith of followers from a certain descent; nor does it belong to one geographical part of the world; nor does it belong to a different time era.

Islam is a progressive and adapting religion that transcends all racial, native tongue, socio-economic, and gender lines. It is open and free to be explored, challenged, accepted, and even rejected. God says in the Quran, *"There is no compulsion in religion. The right direction is henceforth distinct from error. Thus whoever rejects evil and believes in God has grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold that never breaks." (2:256)*

Islam is a faith that believes in the exclusive oneness, justice, and mercy of God and the sole purpose of this religion is to enlighten the hearts of people so that they may understand the message of God and then live by it.

This book *Discovering Islam* has been an instrumental tool for thousands of readers looking for a simple way of understanding Islam and Muslims.

This is the third printing of the book since 1999 and it is enlightening for first-time readers who are searching for a simple, general book on Islam, and perhaps may inspire the reader to search deeper into the faith.

This book would not have been possible without the sincere assistance and suggestions of Sister Fatma Saleh. My thanks are also extended to Shaykh Saleem Bhimji who took great effort in getting this work published.

To them both I am thankful.

Sayed Moustafa al-Qazwini

Orange County, California

July 23, 2008

It is customary in Islam that when the name of Allah, Prophet Muhammad, prophets, or imams (descendants and successors of Prophet Muhammad) is enunciated, the following phrases are mentioned:

Allah - *"Glorified and Exalted"*
(Subhanna wa-tallah)
Written abbreviation - *SWT*

Prophet Muhammad *"Peace be upon him and his family"*
Written abbreviation - *pbuh&hf*

After the names of prophets, imams from the family of Prophet Muhammad and his daughter:

"Peace be upon him/her"
Written abbreviation - *pbuh*

With great respect, admiration, recognition, and praise, I have omitted the mentioned phrases for the sake of continuity.

Contents

What is Islam?

Islam[1] means “submitting or surrendering one’s will to the will of God (Allah).”[2]

The human beings’ innate disposition naturally submits to the reverence of God; this natural feeling was infused with him or her on the day of creation. In reality, the entire universe, through its ordered workings all submit to the will of God. Modern science calls these phenomena “the laws of nature,” but these laws of nature, from an Islamic perspective, are not just any set of laws, rather, they are the laws of God for nature. Human beings depend on, and are in need of God’s sustenance and guidance throughout their entire lives; thus, the human being must yield his self-will and desires to the will of the Creator.

Submission to God does not entail self-humiliation or a denial of human intellect; rather, it means trusting the knowledge, wisdom, and fairness of the Creator. In some form of an act or instance, people involuntary trust and depend on the safety of their lives to others. Hence, the decision to trust a person with more knowledge is logical; therefore, trusting the wisdom of God does not constitute abandoning one’s intellect, but rather, it constitutes following one’s natural inclination.

The word Islam has other meanings, one of which is “to have peace.” God says in the Quran,[3] *“He is Allah, there is no god but Him -*

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[1] From the Arabic verb *aslama*, meaning ‘to surrender.’
[2] The Arabic word for the One God.
[3] Quran: Islam’s Divine Book.

the King, the Holy One, and the Peace.” (59:23) Moreover, the Quran states, *“And Allah invites to the abode of peace.” (10:25)*

By its connotations of peace and safety, the word Islam indicates that the religion is free from any deficiencies or defects. As a religion, Islam is considered *perfect* because it was ordained by God and not invented or marked by mankind: *“This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion.” (5:3)*

Commanded by God, Prophet Abraham was the first person to use the words *Islam* and *Muslim*,[4] *“It [the teachings of monotheism of Islam] is the religion of your father Abraham. He [God] has named you Muslims both before and in this [Quran].” (22:78)* In another passage of the Quran we read, *“Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but he was a true Muslim [submissive to God] and was not one of the polytheists.” (3:67)* Not only did Prophet Abraham call his religion Islam, but the prophets after Abraham also called their religion Islam. Prophet Joseph,[5] in the chapter entitled “Joseph” in the Quran states, *“My Lord! You have given me authority and taught me the interpretation of things. O Creator of the heavens and earth! You are my guardian in this world and in the Hereafter. Cause me to die as a Muslim, submitting to Your will, and join me with the righteous.” (12:101)*

Thus, God declares in the Quran, *“Truly the religion before Allah is Islam.” (3:19)*

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[4] The word Muslim refers to a follower of the religion of Islam and it means “one who surrenders to the will of God.”
[5] The son of Prophet Jacob from whom the ‘Tribes of Israel’ come from.

Who are the Muslims?

Muslims are the followers of the religion of Islam (those who submit to the will of God as explained in the Quran and the traditions[6] of Prophet Muhammad, the Messenger of Islam).

Today, the Muslim population is over a billion and it is spread over a vast range of races, nationalities, and cultures. Approximately 18% of the Muslims live in the Arab world, while the majority live in Asia and Africa. The largest Muslim population is in Indonesia, and a significant number of Muslim minorities exist in Russia, China, Europe, North America, and South America. The Muslim population in the United States is estimated to be around six million.

How Does One Become a Muslim?

The basic requirement to become a Muslim is to declare, "*Ashhadu an laa ilaaha illa Allah, wa ashhadu anna Muhammadan rasul Allah*." In English this means, "I testify that there is no god but Allah, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God."

Anyone who proclaims this phrase joins the ranks of the Muslim nation (*ummah*). This statement marks the beginning of one's physical and spiritual journey in practicing the aspects of Islam. A Muslim strives to become one who the Quran terms as the *faithful* (*mumin*). Although this journey in becoming 'faithful' may be long, its rewards are numerous for those who embark on it with sincere will and intention.

[6] Traditions are referred to in the Arabic language as *Hadith* or *Sunnah* and these are the actions, words, and recorded acts of consent of the Prophet Muhammad in matters pertaining to the meaning and practices of Islam which have been transmitted through a line of reliable and authentic narrators.

Practicing Islam requires learning Islamic ideas, teachings, and practices, then adhering to them. Moreover, Islamic practice requires some sacrifice. However, the necessity of sacrifice should not be a deterrent. Prophet Muhammad states, "*Whenever someone gives up something for the sake of God, God will replace it with something better.*"

Sincerity of belief also develops over time. When Prophet Muhammad began spreading the message of Islam, some people came to him and informed him that they were believers in Islam. In reply, God revealed the following verse, *"Say [Muhammad to them]: 'You believe not,' but say, 'We have submitted to Islam,' for faith has not yet entered your hearts." (49:14)*

The successor to Prophet Muhammad, Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib,[7] has described the dynamic process of following Islam, *"I am defining Islam as no one has defined it before me: Islam is submission, submission is conviction, conviction is affirmation, affirmation is acknowledgement, acknowledgement is performance of obligations, and the performance of obligations is good deeds."*[8]

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[7] Imam Ali was Prophet Muhammad's first-cousin and son-in-law. Since the age of six, Imam Ali was raised and educated by the Prophet.

[8] *Nahj al-Balagha* (The Peak of Eloquence), sermon #125. This work is a collection of sermons, lectures and sayings of Imam Ali complied by al-Sharif al-Radi (420 AH/972 CE).

I

PILLARS OF ISLAM

THE ISLAMIC BELIEFS

Monotheism of Allah (*Tawheed*)

Monotheism is the essence of Islam. It is the affirmation of believing that there is no other divinity other than God. For the most part, the spirit of the Quran revolves around the theme of pure monotheism. Thus, God is the center of a Muslim's belief. Whereas other religions focus on individuals, for example, Christianity's focus on Jesus Christ, Islam focuses solely on God.

Islam is based on the Absolute (God), not His manifestations. The Quran itself speaks about the oneness of God, *"Allah has borne witness that there is no god other than Him, and the angels, and those with knowledge also witness this. He is always standing firm on justice. There is no god but Him, the Mighty, the Wise." (3:18)*

The oneness of God is not only a philosophical argument, rather it is also an affirmation which all human beings once declared before their souls entered their body, as God says, *"[Remember] when your Lord brought forth the children of Adam from their loins and made them testify over themselves, saying, "Am I not your Lord?" They said, "Yes! We testify," lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, 'Verily, we were unaware of this.'" (7:172)*

In this event, every person to be created until the end of time proclaimed God's majesty, sovereignty, power, transcendence, and absolute oneness.

Such was the covenant God made with all people at the time of their creation, whether people presently claim to believe in God or not. Similarly, all people today, regardless of their origin, are

naturally inclined towards the idea that God is one and does not have a partner. The Quran informs Prophet Muhammad of the following, *"Set your face to the true religion [the Islamic belief of monotheism], the natural inclination [fitra] with which Allah has created mankind. [Let there be] no change in what Allah has made; that is the straight religion, but most people do not understand." (30:30)*

Describing God

One of the shortest chapters in the Quran, "The Oneness of Allah,"[9] summarizes the nature of God in five verses, *"In the name of Allah, the Infinitely Compassionate, the Most Merciful: Say, 'He is Allah, the One; Allah, the Eternal Originator; He does not bear children, nor was He born; and He is beyond compare.'"*

The most fundamental Islamic teachings about God are contained in the previous verses; there is only one God, He is eternal, unique, and has no kinship, creator, or resemblance to any human being.

Throughout their mission, every prophet stated some of the divine attributes of God. Prophet Abraham said, *"My Lord is He who gives life and causes death." (2:258)* When confronting Pharaoh, Moses said, *"Our Lord is He Who gave each thing its form and nature then guided it aright" (20:50).* These two verses describe God and His relation to human beings; however, God's being extends far beyond His relation to mankind. Imam Ali described God in the following manner:

> "*He who assigns to Him different conditions does not believe in His oneness, nor does he who likens Him, grasp His reality. He who illustrates Him, does not signify Him; he who points at Him*

[9] *Al-Tawhid*, c.112.

> *and imagines Him, does not mean Him. Everything that is known through itself has been created, and everything that exists by virtue of other things is the effect of a cause. He works but not with the help of instruments; He fixes measures, but not with the activities of thinking; He is rich, but not by acquisition. Time does not keep company with Him, and implements do not help Him. His being precedes time, His existence precedes non-existence, and His eternity precedes beginning. By His creating the senses, it is known that He does not possess such senses. By the contraries in various matters, it is known that He has no contrary, and by the similarity between things it is known that there is nothing similar to Him. He has made light the contrary of darkness, brightness that of gloom, dryness that of moisture, and heat that of cold. He produces affection among inimical things. He is not confined by limits, nor counted by numbers. Material parts can surround things of their own kind, and organs can point out things similar to themselves...Through them, the Creator manifests Himself to the intelligence, and through them He is guarded from the sight of the eyes...He has not begotten anyone lest He be regarded as having been born. He has not been begotten; otherwise, He would be contained within limits. He is too high to have sons...Understanding cannot think of Him so as to give Him shape..."*[10]

God expresses His own eternity and perpetuity in the Quran when He states, *"Everything on earth shall perish, but the face of Allah will remain, full of majesty and honor." (55:26-27)*

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[10] *Nahj al-Balagha* (The Peak of Eloquence), sermon #186.

The 99 Names of Allah

The Quran states, *"And to Allah belong the most beautiful names, so call on Him by them."* (7:180)

Islamic tradition states that God has many different names representing different aspects of His being; ninety-nine are known commonly among Muslims.

The Beneficent	*Ar-Rahmān*
The Merciful	*Ar-Rahīm*
The Sovereign	*Al-Mālik*
The Holy	*Al-Quddūs*
The Peace	*As-Salām*
The Protector	*Al-Muhaymin*
The Mighty	*Al-Aziz*
The Compeller	*Al-Jabbār*
The Majestic	*Al-Mutakabbir*
The Creator	*Al-Khāliq*
The Evolver	*Al-Bāri'*
The Fashioner	*Al-Musawwir*
The Forgiver	*Al-Ghaffār*
The Subduer	*Al-Qahhār*
The Bestower	*Al-Wahhāb*
The Provider	*Ar-Razzāq*
The Opener	*Al-Fattāh*
The Knowing	*Al-Alim*

The Constrictor	*Al-Qābid*
The Expander	*Al-Bāsit*
The Abaser	*Al-Khāfid*
The Wise	*Al-Hakīm*
The Glorious	*Al-Majīd*
The Exalter	*Ar-Rāfi*
The Honorer	*Al-Mu'izz*
The Dishonorer	*Al-Mudhill*
The Hearing	*As-Samī*
The Seeing	*Al-Basīr*
The Judge	*Al-Hakam*
The Able	*Al-Qādir*
The Great	*Al-Azim*
The All-Forgiving	*Al-Ghafūr*
The Appreciative	*Ash-Shakūr*
The High	*Al-Ali*
The Immense	*Al-Kabīr*
The Preserver	*Al-Hāfiz*
The Maintainer	*Al-Muqīt*
The Reckoner	*Al-Hasīb*
The Majestic	*Al-Jalīl*
The Generous	*Al-Karīm*
The Watchful	*Ar-Raqīb*
The Responsive	*Al-Mujīb*

The Loving	*Al-Wadūd*
The Strong	*Al-Qawī*
The Firm	*Al-Matīn*
The Truth	*Al-Haqq*
The Trustee	*Al-Wakīl*
The Guardian	*Al-Walī*
The Praiseworthy	*Al-Hamīd*
The Enumerator	*Al-Muhsī*
The Originator	*Al-Mubdī*
The Restorer	*Al-Mu'īd*
The Giver of Life	*Al-Muhyī*
The Living	*Al-Hayy*
The Finder	*Al-Wājid*
The Noble	*Al-Mājid*
The Unique	*Al-Wāhid*
The One	*Al-Ahad*
The Eternal	*As-Samad*
The Guide	*Al-Hādi*
The Powerful	*Al-Muqtadir*
The Expediter	*Al-Muqaddim*
The Delayer	*Al-Mu'akhir*
The Manifest	*Az-Zāhir*
The Equitable	*Al-Muqsit*
The Exalted	*Al-Muta'ali*

The Avenger	*Al-Muntaqim*
The Pardoner	*Al-‘Afuw*
The Compassionate	*Ar-Ra’uf*
The Patient	*As-Sabur*
The Gatherer	*Al-Jāmi’*
The Self-Sufficient	*Al-Ghanī*
The Enricher	*Al-Mughnī*
The Preventer	*Al-Māni*
The Distresser	*Ad-Darr*
The Incomparable	*Al-Badi*
The Everlasting	*Al-Bāqi*
The Inheritor	*Al-Wārith*
The First	*Al-Awwal*
The Last	*Al-Ākhir*
The Hidden	*Al-Bātin*
The Governor	*Al-Wāli*
The Resurrector	*Al-Bā’ith*
The Witness	*Ash-Shāhid*
The Aware	*Al-Khabīr*
The Kind	*Al-Halīm*
The Benefiter	*An-Nāfi*
The Light	*An-Nūr*
The Just	*Al-Adl*
The Subtle	*Al-Latīf*

The Lord of Majesty and Bounty	*Dhul Jalāli wal Ikrām*
The Acceptor of Repentance	*Al-Tawwab*
The Guide to the Right Path	*Ar-Rashīd*
The Owner of Sovereignty	*Mālik al-Mulk*
The Source of Goodness	*Al-Barr*
The Creator of Death	*Al-Mumīt*
The All-Surrounding	*Al-Wāsi*
The Source of Goodness	*Al-Barr*

Viewpoints of Islam and Christianity Concerning God

The emergence of Islam returned the Abrahamic monotheism to its original purity. Islam perceives the doctrine of trinity and incarnation as a veil cast upon the complete reality of Divine unity. Nothing should compromise divine unity. God is the absolute, the One without condition, and above all relations.

The distinguishable feature of the Islamic faith from other monotheistic religions is its insistence on absolute monotheism. Islam entirely opposes any association concerning God and the notion that Jesus, the Messenger of God, was God himself. God states in the Quran, *"It is not for a man, that Allah should give him [Jesus] the Book [Gospel], and judgment and apostleship, and yet he [Jesus] should say to people, "Worship me rather than Allah," but rather [he would say] "Be a godly people, because of your teaching the Book and because of studying it [yourselves]." (3:79)*[11]

Muslims believe that Jesus was a human prophet who was divinely inspired by God, and they consider him to be a servant

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[11] Also see Quran 5:72-75.

and conveyer of God's message and neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament mentions that Jesus was the son of God.

Barbara Brown, a contemporary American scholar, supports this idea with the following statement:

> The doctrine of divinity states that Jesus is the Son of God, the Word of God made flesh. Even though Jesus himself never claimed to be divine, Paul gave him this attribute for one reason - to gain converts among the Gentiles. The Gentiles were pagans who were used to worshipping gods that had wonderful legends and myths behind them. Several of the pagan deities of the time such as Mithras, Adonis, Attis, and Osiris were the offspring of a supreme ruling idol and each had died a violent death at a young age, coming back to life a short time later in order to save their people. Paul took this into account, giving the pagans something similar in Christianity. He attributed divinity to Jesus, saying he was the Son of God, the Supreme, and that he too had died for their sins. In doing so, Paul compromised the teaching of Jesus with pagan beliefs in order to make Christianity more acceptable to the Gentiles.
>
> The term "son of God" was not something new. However, it had been used in the Old Testament to refer to David (Saul 2:7) and his son Solomon (I Chronicles 22:100) and to refer to Adam (Luke 3:38) in the New Testament. In his famous Sermon on the Mount, detailed in Matthew 5, Jesus tells his listeners, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." In all cases, the term "son of God" was not meant to be applied literally but to

> signify love and affection from God to the righteous. "Son of God" means a special closeness to God, not to be of God. After all, people are sons [spiritual dependants] of God, and God is the creator of all life.[12]

Christians who lived during the time of Jesus believed that Jesus was divinely inspired by God and not God himself. However, after the ascension of Jesus to heaven, Saint Paul, who was deeply influenced by Roman paganism, wanted his preaching of Christianity to be more appealing to the Gentiles and thus, he compromised the teachings of Jesus by adopting certain pagan ideas and interpolating them into Christianity. Even though it was not part of the original teachings of Jesus, the idea of the trinity has widely spread.

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[12] Barbara Brown, *A Closer Look at Christianity.*

II

DIVINE JUSTICE (*'ADL*)

Anyone who believes in the monotheism taught by Islam must also believe in God's justice.

God is just and He never wrongs. Moreover, He does not have a cause for injustice toward His creatures, for injustice is an immoral action and God is incapable of evil. God is omniscient and never neglects any matter. God is self-sufficient and He is not in need of help from others. He is also the possessor of everything, and His wisdom transcends the universe. For example, the Quran states, *"He is always standing firm on justice. There is no Allah but Him, the Mighty, the Wise." (3:18)* Another verse reads, *"And your Lord does not deal unjustly with anyone." (18:49)* A third verse tells us, *"We*[13] *did not wrong them, but they wronged themselves." (16:118)*

Just as God encourages human beings to emulate some of His attributes, such as being *patient* and *forgiving*, God also requires mankind to follow the ways of justice. For example, the Quran states, *"Say: 'My Lord has enjoined upon me justice.'" (7:29)* Although people may falter in the way of justice, none of God's prophets or their successors has ever committed acts of injustice.

God's justice embraces the entire universe and whoever ponders over the existence of the universe and the order therein will not only observe the expansion of God's justice over His entire creation, but also each of the creations become apparent in all aspects of nature, from the physical world to the biological

[13] Although in Islam, there is only One God, however the formal way of speaking in Arabic calls for one to refer to himself in the plural. This is done to signify the majesty, glory, and power of Allah.

world, and from the microcosms to the macrocosms. The justice of God is particularly visible in the destiny and free-will of human beings.

Although God's justice encompasses everything, people should invoke God to treat them not with His justice, but rather His mercy. If God had punished people immediately for their sins, then humanity would have perished long time ago.

Compulsion (*Jabr*) or Free Will (*Tafwid*)

The question of man's pre-destination or freedom of choice has preoccupied human beings throughout the ages, and it continues to be discussed by Islamic philosophers and scholars.

Ultimately, two schools of thought regarding this question emerged. One, called the *Compulsionist* (*Jabr*), holds that human beings do not have the freedom of choice. Every decision, utterance, and action a person performs has been pre-destined since the time of creation. Compulsionists believe that the faithful have no choice in their faith. Likewise, the unfaithful also have no choice but to not believe in God. They maintain that everything is unalterable and pre-determined.

The second school of thought who believe in Free Will (*Tafwid*) declare that human beings are masters over their own acts. This notion is in concordance with the Quran which states, "*None will be wronged in anything, nor will you be requited anything except that which you used to do.*" *(36:54)* In addition, they rely upon another verse from the Quran which states, "*The truth is from your Lord. So whomever wills, let him believe, and whoever wills, let him disbelieve.*" *(18:29)* From these two verses, it can be concluded that human beings have the freedom to act, but they must bear the moral responsibility and consequence of their own actions.

Furthermore, the acknowledgement of Divine will itself makes people accept that their very actions are not pre-destined.

The beginning of spiritual guidance is always from God, but the beginning of man’s destruction is one’s own erroneous choice, as the Quran states, “*Whatever good reaches you is from Allah, but whatever evil befalls you is from yourself.*” *(4:79)*

III

PROPHETHOOD (*NUBUWWA*)

Prophets are individuals who received Divine revelation and guidance to lead humanity towards righteousness and a recognition of God.

Since the inception of history, God sent numerous prophets and messengers to mankind. The messages of the prophets were of two types: regional or universal. While the local prophets were sent with specific messages to specific groups of people; the universal prophets were sent with messages and books for mankind and these were limited to five: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad (peace be upon all of them).

A unique characteristic of all the prophets and messengers is that they were infallible. They committed no sins. To demonstrate the validity of this concept is to consider that humanity needed prophets and messengers to set an exemplary structured lifestyle to emulate and follow. If they had committed errors, then people might be obliged to exemplify and excuse their errors, thus making the prophets and messengers untrustworthy.

Infallibility means protection from error in teaching doctrine of faith and morals and is defined as a spiritual grace from God that enables a person to abstain from sins by his own free will. The power of infallibility and immunity from sins does not make a person incapable of committing mistakes; rather, he or she refrains from transgression by his or her own power and will, due to realizing the consequences of their actions.

Infallibility is essential since the mission of the prophets and messengers was not only to convey Divine scriptures from God,

but also to guide humanity toward the right path [God]. Therefore, prophets and messengers had to be role models and perfect examples for humanity. The mention of infallibility is stated thirteen times in the Quran, and one such example is when God said to Satan, *"Certainly you shall have no authority over My servants except those who follow you and go astray." (15:42)* In another instance in the Quran we read, "*Satan then said to God, 'By Your might, then I will surely mislead them all, except Your chosen servants among them [the messengers and imams].'" (38:82)*

When we look at the example of Prophet Muhammad, we see that he never committed any sin, nor was he ever harsh to any person or animal! God has stated in the Quran, *"And by the mercy of Allah you dealt with them [people] gently, and had you been severe and harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from you." (3:158)*

In most societies, people with questionable records of conduct would be ineligible from becoming presidential or gubernatorial candidates, since they would have to set the examples of righteousness and honesty in order to lead society rightfully. This is also expected of the prophets.

Unfortunately, many distorted stories and images about God's prophets exist. For example, stories in the present-day version of the Old Testament accuse Prophet David of adultery with Baath-Sheba; Prophet Noah of being drunk; Prophet Lot of having committed incest; and Prophet Moses of committing adultery! Islam adamantly opposes such unethical and immoral writings that have been attributed to the prophets of God.

Nonetheless, the Quran does mention the slips of some prophets, such as the instruction that forbade Adam from eating of the

tree.[14] However, such a verse cannot be understood literally as Prophet Adam having committed a sin because the verses of the Quran can be divided into two types - allegorical and metaphorical verses - and both types are quite common in the Quran.[15] Prophet Adam did not disobey the obligatory commands of God; rather, the command which he did not honor was a recommended suggestion. Therefore, in the teachings of Islam, Prophet Adam cannot be considered as having committed a sin.

Another belief of the Muslims is that God preordained all of the prophets; but at the same time, they had to strive for prophethood. The foremost example of the vocational test that prophets had to endure is told in the life of Prophet Abraham, the father of all prophets.

Prophet Abraham was born into an idolatrous society, but the purity of his nature recognized that the worship of idols was wrong, and he acknowledged that the idols were incapable of doing any harm or good.

One day, when no one was present, Prophet Abraham destroyed all of the idols, except for the largest. Upon their return to the village, the people began to question Prophet Abraham about the destruction of their gods. Prophet Abraham's reply was for the people to question the remaining statue for the answer since they believed that their stone idols had power.

Although the people were aware that their idols were indeed powerless, they did not know how to respond to the situation. Thus, out of embarrassment and anger, they cast Prophet Abraham into a colossal fire. However, God protected Prophet

[14] See Quran 20:115-123.
[15] See Quran 3:7.

Abraham from the fire and confounded the plots of the polytheists.[16]

After being tortured for and then saved by his faith in God; Prophet Abraham still had to undergo the hardest test of obedience - a direct order in the form of a dream (which came from God[17]) to sacrifice his son Ishmael.

Although sadness overwhelmed him, Prophet Abraham was a strong believer in God, and thus, did not question the Divine order. Ishmael, too, unquestionably accepted the command of God by allowing his father to lead him to a mountain-top to be sacrificed. Ishmael's only request was that his father place him face down in order that his father would not see his facial expression during the sacrifice.

Prophet Abraham raised his blade, ready to comply with the command of God, when a revelation intercepted and caused the cessation of the sacrifice of his son. Prophet Abraham had proven his loyalty to God, and this incident was a trial to measure his faith.

Prophet Abraham was then given a sheep to sacrifice instead. The great trial of this prophet is remembered every year as the *Feast of Sacrifice* (*Eid al-Adha*). This is a special holiday for Muslims in which the meat of animals is distributed to the poor.

After passing these tests, Prophet Abraham became the leader of mankind, as well as the father of the prophets of the three main monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

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[16] This story is mentioned in the Quran 21:51-68.

[17] A similar story is mentioned in the Old Testament; however, the difference in the Old Testament from Islam's account is that Isaac was the son that was to be sacrificed, not Ishmael.

Why Did God Send Different Prophets and Different Religions?

The total number of prophets that God sent to humanity was 124,000, and although they were sent to nearly all civilizations, the Quran only mentions twenty-five of them by name. The first of them was Prophet Adam, the father of humanity, and the last of them was Prophet Muhammad, the seal of the prophets.

Throughout history, different messengers with slightly different messages were sent to diverse societies. The reason was that the religious needs of humanity were growing and developing just as the human race was growing and developing. Also, diverse civilizations needed to be approached differently in relation to guidance. Nevertheless, the source and basic message behind the calling was the same - that there was only one God.

God sent Prophet Moses with the Torah as a light and guidance for the Children of Israel, along with many other prophets, such as prophets David and Solomon.

One thousand and five hundred years after Prophet Moses, God sent Prophet Jesus, the son of Mary, confirming the Torah and bringing the Gospel, which was also a book of guidance and light.

Finally, six-hundred years after Prophet Jesus, God sent Prophet Muhammad with the Quran to confirm the messages sent before him and to complete the revelation of a universal religion to humanity.

Since all of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic prophets were sequentially sent, the question arises as to why Judaism, Christianity, and Islam now exist as separate religions. The answer is that the followers of these religions, particularly Judaism and Christianity, interpreted the teachings of their

prophets differently. The Quran says, *"Verily, the religion with Allah is Islam [total submission to Allah's will]; and those whom the Book had been given did not differ but after the knowledge [the truth] had come unto them, out of envy among themselves." (3:19)*[19]

Nevertheless, many scholars consider the different religions as a Divine test. The Quran says, *"For each of you, We have made a Law and a clear way. If Allah had willed, He would have made you one nation but that He may test you in what He has given you. So strive in good deeds. Your return is to Allah; then He will inform you about that which you used to differ." (5:48)*

The Life of Prophet Muhammad

In the 6th century CE Arabia, the majority of people were pagans. They lived in tribes, each with its own leader. Some were agriculture and cattle farmers, others were merchants and traders, while others raided other tribes for booty as a means of survival.

It was into this society, in 570 CE, that Prophet Muhammad was born into the tribe of the Quraysh,[20] in the city of Mecca. His father[21] died before he was born and his mother[22] died when he was still a young child, and thus, it was his grandfather[24] who

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[19] Also see Quran 10:93.

[20] The Quraysh were a major tribe in Mecca, of which the clan of Hashim was a part of and to which Prophet Muhammad belonged.

[21] His father was Abdullah ibn Abd al-Muttalib.

[22] His mother was Amina, daughter of Wahab.

[24] Paternal grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib ibn Hashim.

brought him up and looked after him. When his grandfather died, his paternal uncle, Abu Talib[25] cared for him.

While growing up, Prophet Muhammad became known as "Muhammad the Truthful and the Trustworthy One" (*As-Sadiq, al-Amin*).

Early into his adulthood, Prophet Muhammad worked for a successful widow, Khadijah,[26] who was so impressed with his honesty that she asked him to marry her. At that time, the Prophet was twenty-five years old, and remained in this monogamous marriage until Khadijah's death twenty-five years later.

Often, Prophet Muhammad would take a respite from the bustle of Mecca by traveling to a cave for periods of reflection. During one such time, when Muhammad was forty years old, he heard

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[25] His paternal uncle was the father of Imam Ali, and he was one of the chiefs of Mecca and noblemen of Quraysh. He was famous for his generosity, bravery, and dedication in protecting his nephew, Prophet Muhammad. He accepted Islam and supported the Prophet until the end of his life.

[26] Lady Khadijah, the first and most revered wife of the Prophet. She was the first female to embrace Islam. Khadijah bore the Prophet children; two sons, Qasim and Abdullah; four daughters: Ruqayah, Zaineb, Um-Kalthum, and Fatima. The male children died while the Prophet was in Mecca, while the daughters survived beyond the advent of their father's prophethood. Khadijah was known for her noble traits and sincere dedication to the Prophet. Prophet Muhammad once described Khadijah in the following statement: *"I have not acquired a better wife after her, she believed in my prophethood at a time when people rejected it. She placed her wealth at my disposal when people deprived me of attaining it, and Allah gave me, only through her, children, and not from any other woman."*
Jafar Subhani, *The Message,* p.190.

the voice of an angel named Gabriel[27] giving him a command, *"Recite in the Name of your Lord who creates, creates man from a clot. Recite! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful, who taught the use of the pen, taught mankind that which they knew not."* (96: 1-5)

Prophet Muhammad repeated the words until he had memorized them. He then rushed home and told his experience to his wife, Khadijah who comforted and reassured him. Khadijah and the Prophet's young cousin, Ali, were the first people to understand and accept that God had chosen "the Truthful and the Trustworthy" to deliver God's final guidance. Prophet Muhammad continued to receive revelations for over twenty years.[28]

As time passed, it became clear to the ever-increasing number of people that Prophet Muhammad was indeed the Messenger of God. The least receptive people were the powerful Meccan leaders whom dealt in idols and slaves. They benefited mostly from idol worshiping and the pilgrim trade. The Meccans treated Prophet Muhammad with derision, but despite this, he continued to deliver the revelations of God's mercy and justice which were welcomed by the poor and oppressed.

The Meccans were becoming more and more intolerant of Prophet Muhammad and felt threatened by the messages he was advocating, such as the oneness of God, and with the increasing

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[27] Angel Gabriel is one of the four Archangels and is considered one of the greatest of all angels since he was the channel through which the Divine books and the scriptures were revealed from God to the prophets.
The other three angels are: Izrail, the angel of death; Israfil, the angel assigned to sound the trumpet on the Day of Resurrection; and Mikail (Michael), who watches over the places of worship.

[28] See Seerat ibn Hisham, v.1, p.236.

number of converts to Islam within the region, the Prophet was becoming a serious threat. In an attempt to dissuade the expansion of Islam, the Quraysh exiled the Prophet, his family, and followers from Mecca. The Quraysh then sanctioned an economic blockade on trade and association with the Muslims.[29]

For three years, the Muslims were sheltered in the valley of Abu Talib, near Mecca. In conditions of hardship and hunger, the Muslims often faced the allotment of one date a day; and at times, two people shared one date. Yet, because of the Muslims' tenacious faith, the siege ended unsuccessfully.

Shortly after the siege ended, the Prophet was once again faced with tribulation. Two of the most influential and dearest people to him died - his uncle, Abu Talib and his beloved wife, Khadijah. Overwhelmed by grief, the Prophet declared that year as "The Year of Sadness."

No longer being protected and supported by his uncle, the Prophet became more vulnerable to the escalating pressure by the Quraysh.

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[29] Seerat ibn Hisham, v.1, p.350. An economic treaty was initiated by the grand counsel of Quraysh which entailed an endorsement and a pledge, until their deaths, by the community not to end the economic ban on the Muslims with the following criteria:

1. Every type of trade or business with the supporters of Muhammad shall be banned.
2. Association with Muhammad and his followers was strictly prohibited.
3. No one was entitled to establish matrimonial ties with the Muslims.
4. Opponents of Muhammad should be supported in all circumstances.

Leaders from the distant town of Yathrib[30] secretly invited the Prophet and his followers to settle in their hometown and to preach the word of Islam. Before migrating to Madina in 622 CE, the Prophet narrowly escaped an assassination attempt in Mecca.[31]

The migration from Mecca to Madina became known as the *Hijrah*, which marks the starting point of the Muslim calendar.[32]

Prophet Muhammad was received with excitement and jubilation[33] in Madina, where he became head of what was to

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[30] Yathrib was a town approximately 350 miles north of Mecca. Yathrib was later renamed Madinatun Nabi, meaning The City of the Prophet.

[31] See Quran 8:30.

[32] The Islamic calendar began at the migration of the Prophet from Mecca to Madina, and it is based on the lunar cycles. Two important incidents occurred before the migration to Madina: the birth of the Prophet, during the Year of the Elephant 570 CE, which symbolizes the year that King Abraha came to destroy the Kabah with a herd of elephants (See Quran c.105) and the ordination of Muhammad to prophethood. Islam, in its first thirteen years in Mecca, was constantly suppressed and its followers were tormented. The migration (*hijrah*) marked the turning point in liberating Islam and its followers. In addition, Madina also provided a safe haven and an opportunity to establish the birth of the Islamic state. Quranic verses regarding rules of social, economic, political, and formal rituals were mostly introduced in Madina. Muslims consider the migration to Madina as an Islamic victory for freedom of religion.

[33] The Prophet proceeded to Madina. When his camel descended at a location known as the Valley of Wada and set its foot on the land of Yathrib, the people warmly welcomed and greeted the Prophet with jubilation. The mood surrounding this event is marked by a well-known poem:

> *The white moon rose over us, from the valley of Wada and we owe it to show gratefulness when the call is to Allah. O you who were raised amongst us coming with a word to be*

become the first Islamic state. Throughout the first ten years in Madina, Muslims witnessed several occasions that were to become milestones in the history of Islam.

The primary task was to build a mosque in Madina. The Prophet himself participated in building the mosque which also incorporated his home. In addition, the companions of the Prophet built their homes in close proximity to the mosque to be near the Prophet.

It was necessary for the Prophet to create a center where its members could assemble; and thus the mosque was not only a place of worship, but also a center of social, political, and educational services.

It was in Madina that the unity of brotherhood amongst the Muslims was introduced. There were two major tribes in Madina: the Muhajireen (immigrants) and the Ansar (indigenous).[34] The Ansar were divided into two groups: Aws and Khazraj[35] - tribes who had been fighting each other for over 100 years. Under a common purpose [Islam], the Prophet appeased the animosity that existed among the two tribes by establishing a form of brotherhood between them. *"Now you have become brothers in faith, by pairs,"* the Prophet said to his followers.[36] By this method, the Prophet insured the political and spiritual nature of his nation.

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obeyed; you have brought to this city nobleness; welcome best caller to God's way!

[34] Muhajireen (Muslim immigrants from Mecca) and Ansar (the Helpers who received the Prophet in Madina) were the two major groups of Muslims in Madina.

[35] Aws and Khazraj were major tribes within Ansar that lived and supported the Prophet in Madina.

[36] Seerat ibn Hisham, v.1 p.123.

Today, the unity of brotherhood continues to remain a tremendous act of equality among Muslims. Islam is a foundation upon which all races, nationalities, cultures, socio-economic levels, and genders can be united by religious kinship.

The Prophet made the institution of matrimony easier as well. The gift of marriage *(mahr)*, which the man is to give to his bride was made moderate, and inter-marriages with other tribes became more accessible as socio-economic or ancestral descent was no longer a major factor in marriage. The establishment of marriage became a form of uniting, securing, and promoting Islam within various tribes and nations. Marriage not only symbolized the religious union of a man and a woman, but also, indirectly influenced and affected social and political ties. The Prophet said, *"He who wishes to appear before God with a pure soul, should get married."* [37]

The Prophet set the example of marriage with his own daughter, Lady Fatima. Although many friends and companions of the Prophet had proposed marriage to Fatima, they were made aware that her marriage was not going to be based on affluence, rank, or descent. The men knew that the person that resembled the Prophet in matters of truthfulness, spiritual merit, and moral excellence would be none other than Ali.

The Prophet (by God's direction) told the suitors that the marriage of Fatima would only occur by Divine order. When Ali approached the Prophet to seek his blessings in marrying his daughter, he was overcome with shyness. The Prophet encouraged him to speak at which point Ali proposed. However the Prophet did not answer him immediately. The Prophet then

[37] Jafar Subhani, *The Message,* p.358.

consulted Fatima and sought her reply, which she accepted. The marriage of Ali and Fatima was then solemnized by God Himself and declared as such by the Prophet .

After the migration to Madina, the Prophet faced continual threats from the Quraysh and the polytheists of Mecca, and the non-Muslims who lived in and around Madina. Peace and security were paramount, yet the Prophet's attempts to keep peace within the region were proving to be futile. The opposition in Mecca mobilized its troops to demolish the newly established Islamic state in Madina.

Standing firm in the face of military aggression, the Prophet was compelled to defend Islam in what became known as the "Battle of Badr." The battle erupted only two years after the *hijrah* (migration), and although the Prophet's army was far outnumbered – historians report that they were out powered and outnumbered three to one - they triumphed. A story about this battle in the Quran reveals that God sent an army of angels to assist the Muslims against the Meccans.[38]

The Muslim success in the battle gave immense prestige to the infant Islamic community in Madina and struck a major blow to the pride of the Meccans.

The following year, the Meccans wanted to avenge their defeat. On a small mountain called Uhud, west of Madina, the second major battle was fought which became known as the "Battle of Uhud."

In the beginning of the battle, the Muslims showed signs of victory. However, the insubordination[39] of some Muslim men

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[38] See Quran 3:124-126.

[39] See Quran 3:152; Seerat ibn Hisham, v.2 p.400.

caused the final setback in the battle in which many Muslims were injured and lost their lives. The Prophet himself was injured and he lost his beloved uncle, Hamza ibn Abdul Muttalib, who was one of his greatest supporters.

Although the Battle of Uhud was a setback for the Muslim community, they were able to remain in Madina.

Afterwards, many other victorious defensive battles consolidated the Muslims;[40] hence, Islam became an ever-increasing spiritual and political force in Arabia, which eventually paved the way to the conquest of Mecca.

In the ninth year of the hijrah (630 CE), Prophet Muhammad and his followers entered Mecca after a peaceful surrender by the Meccans. The Prophet went directly to the *Kabah*[41] to perform the *tawaf* (circumambulation). As he entered the station of the Kabah, there sat the three main idols that the pagans had worshipped above the Kabah's door entrance. With his spear, Prophet Muhammad destroyed them while reciting, "*And say, truth has arrived and falsehood has perished, for falsehood is bound to perish.*"[42]

Subsequently, more than three-hundred idols were destroyed inside and around the Kabah. The destruction of the idols symbolized the arrival and the proclamation of truth and the end to falsehood. Islam was now home. The Prophet then granted

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[40] Battles such as: Ahzab, which took place in 5 AH (626 CE), Khaybar, which took place in 7 AH (628 CE), Mutah, which took place in 8 AH (629 CE), and Thatusalasil, which took place in 8 AH (629 CE).

[41] The Kabah is a cube made of stone. It was first built by Prophet Adam. Later, Prophet Abraham and his son Ishmael rebuilt the Kabah's foundation. The Kabah is the center and direction of Muslim prayers.

[42] Quran 17:31.

general amnesty to all the Meccans who had fought against him for twenty-two years. Afterwards he addressed them with these words, *"You have been unreasonable countrymen. You refuted my prophethood and turned me out of my home, and when I took refuge in a far-off place, you rose to fight against me. You killed my uncle and my best companions. However, in spite of all these crimes of yours, I forgive all of you and make you free, and declare that you may go after the pursuits of your life."*[43]

During the tenth year of the hijrah, the Prophet performed the "Farewell Hajj,"[44] which was also his only and final Hajj pilgrimage. On the day of Arafat,[45] over 100,000 pilgrims were present when the Prophet commenced his sermon by saying, *"O people! Hear my words, for it possible that I may not meet you at this place in the future. O people! Your blood and property (honor and reputation) are forbidden toward one another until the day you meet Allah. O people! Your women have rights upon you and you also have rights upon them. You should treat them with kindness and love, and you should provide them with a comfortable means in life…"*[46]

After the farewell pilgrimage and three months before the Prophet's death, the final verse of the Quran was revealed,

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[43] Seerat ibn Hisham, v.4 p.55.

[44] See Quran chapter *Hajj* (22).

[45] The Day of Arafat is a holy day for the Muslims and is the 9th day of the 12th lunar Islamic month of Dhul Hijjah. This happens to be approximately 70 days after the end of the month of Ramadan and marks the climax of the Hajj pilgrimage. The day following Arafat is the major Islamic Holiday of Eid al-Adha. At dawn of this day, Muslim pilgrims will make their way from Mecca to a nearby hillside and plain called Mount Arafat and the Plain of Arafat.

[46] Seerat ibn Hisham v.2 p.605.

"Today I [Allah] have perfected for you your religion, completed My favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion." (5:3)

On the 28th of Safar (the second month of the lunar-based, Islamic calendar) 11 AH (632 CE), at the age of sixty-three, the Noble Prophet died. At the time of his death, the majority of the people in Arabia had accepted Islam as their religion and way of life.

IV

SUCCESSION TO PROPHET MUHAMMAD (*IMAMA*)

All of the universal messengers of God had successors. God appointed His messengers for the guidance of mankind; and as a matter of necessity, He also appointed successors to the prophets and messengers.

Prophet Abraham was succeeded by two of his sons, Ishmael and Isaac. Prophet Moses after his lifetime, was succeeded by Yusha ibn Noon. Even Prophet Jesus had a successor, Sham'oon ibn Hamoon al-Safa to continue the propagation of his message. Similarly, Prophet Muhammad was succeeded by twelve distinguished successors, one after another. These successors are called *imams* and were appointed by God, not by the masses.

The right to ordain imams belongs to God alone, and the Quran makes this point in many verses, *"And remember when your Lord said to the angels, 'Verily I am going to place a successor [khalifa] on the earth.'" (2:30) "And remember when the Lord of Abraham tried him with certain commands which he fulfilled; Allah said to him, 'Verily I am going to make you a leader [imam] over mankind.'" (2:124)* God addressed Prophet David as such, *"O David! Verily We have placed you as a successor on the earth." (38:26)* God also attributes the right of appointing leaders to Himself, God says, *"We made from among them leaders, giving guidance under Our command." (32:24)*

During the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad, he specifically mentioned the names of the leaders [imams] that would come after him and said that there would be twelve leaders, and that

all of them will be from the descendents of the tribe of the Quraysh.[47]

The imams were the authorities of God among mankind and they all had unique qualities in matters of knowledge, forbearance, morality, and justice.

The twelve successors of Prophet Muhammad are as follows:

1. *Ali ibn Abi Talib*

   Father's name: Abu Talib ibn[48] Abd al-Muttalib

   Mother's name: Lady Fatima bint[49] Asad

   Birth: Mecca, on the 13th of Rajab, 23 BH[50] (600 CE)

   Death: Murdered at the age of sixty-three. While praying in the mosque, he was mortally wounded by a poisoned sword of an assassin on the 21st of Ramadan, 40 AH[51] (661 CE), in Kufa. He is buried in Najaf al-Ashraf (Iraq).

   Known as the "Commander of the Faithful" (*Amir al-Mumineen)*, Imam Ali was the Prophet's first cousin and son-in-law (married to Lady Fatima); he was also the first male to embrace Islam. The Prophet ascribed Imam Ali with historical sayings, such as, "*I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its gate,*" and "*Whoever considers me his leader, Ali is also his leader.*"[52] Imam Ali was recognized for his knowledge,

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[47] Sahih Bukhari, *The Book of Ahkam* (*Laws*), v.1 p.101; Sahih Muslim, *Kitab al-Imaara* (The Book of Leadership), v.1 narrations 4-6.
[48] Ibn means "son of."
[49] Bint means "daughter of."
[50] BH stands for "before Hijrah" – before migration to Madina.
[51] AH stands for "after Hijrah" – after migration to Madina.
[52] Ahmad ibn Hanbal, 4: 281; Al-Tabari, 2:169.

wisdom, bravery, and justice. Many of Imam Ali's traditions and speeches have been preserved in a book called *The Peak of Eloquence* (Nahj al-Balagha).

2. *Hasan ibn Ali*

   Father's name: Ali ibn Abi Talib

   Mother's name: Lady Fatima bint Muhammad

   Birth: Madina, on the 15th Ramadan, 2 AH (625 CE)

   Death: Died at the age of forty-six. Poisoned under the direction of Muawiyah, governor of Syria on the 27th of Safar, 49 AH (670 CE). Buried in Al-Baqi cemetery, Madina.

   Imam Hasan was the eldest son of Imam Ali and Lady Fatima. He devoted himself to the sacred mission of peacefully propagating of Islam. He excelled all others in knowledge and spiritual perfection. He resembled the Prophet in forbearance and generosity. For example, this Imam shared beneficence towards a man who was verbally abusing him. The Imam approached the man with a smile and remarked, "*May peace be with you. I think you have just arrived in this town, if you need food, I can provide food for you. If you need clothing, I can provide you with clothing. If you need shelter, I can provide you with a place to stay. If you need transportation, I can provide you with a ride; and if you need protection, I can protect you.*" After hearing this, the man replied, "*I testify that you are the vicegerent of God on earth, and God knows better whom to entrust with the Divine message.*"

3. *Husayn ibn Ali*

   Father's name: Ali ibn Abi Talib

   Mother's name: Lady Fatima bint Muhammad

Birth: Madina, on the 3rd of Shaban, 3 AH (626 CE)

Death: Martyred at the age of fifty-eight in Karbala (Iraq), by the ruling army of Yazid ibn Muawiyah, on the 10th of Muharram, 61 AH (680 CE) and buried there.

Imam Husayn devoted his life to following the footsteps of his father and grandfather. During the time of the Umayyad Dynasty, corruption and mischief prevailed. Imam Husayn took it upon himself to oppose the authoritative regime of Yazid. By the invitation of the people of Iraq, Imam Husayn left his home in Madina and journeyed to Kufa with his family and companions. Before reaching Kufa, about sixty miles south of Baghdad, on the plains of Karbala, Imam Husayn was unfairly surrounded by Yazid's mass army and ultimately, on the 10th of Muharram, Imam Husayn, his family, and companions were massacred in an unequal and ruthless battle. This day is known in the Islamic history as the "Day of Ashura." The battle of Karbala represents a battle between truth and falsehood, good and evil, justice and injustice, and freedom and oppression. Consequentially, the Imam became the beacon of light for the freedom of all of humanity. His martyrdom shook the foundations of the Muslim nation and stirred the consciousness of the people. Numerous revolutions and revolts followed Imam Husayn's martyrdom until the empire of Bani Umayyad collapsed. Ashura still plays a very significant role in the life of Muslims today, in that the sacrifices of the martyrs symbolize the endeavor to fight injustice and deviation for all times and societies.

4. *Ali ibn al-Husayn*

Father's name: Husayn ibn Ali

Mother's name: Lady Shah-Zanan, daughter of Yazdeger III, King of Persia

Birth: Madina, on the 15th of Jamadi al-Awwal, 36 AH (659 CE)

Death: Died at the age of fifty-eight. Poisoned by Walid ibn Abdil Malik ibn Marwan on the 25th of Muharram, 95 AH (713 CE). Buried in Al-Baqi cemetery, Madina.

He was known for his consistent worshipping and spiritual perfection in helping the needy. He used to carry bags of flour and bread on his back to take to the poor and needy families in Madina. He left behind many legacies of spiritual guidance, prayers, and supplications. A collection of his devotions and prayers are known as "Az-Zabur Aale Muhammad" (*The Psalms of the Family of Muhammad – As-Sahifatul Kamilatul Sajjadiyah*). Whenever a needy person approached him for help the Imam would say, "*Welcome to those who carry my supplies to the next life.*"

5. *Muhammad al-Baqir*

   Father's name: Ali Zaynul Abidin

   Mother's name: Lady Fatima bint Hassan

   Birth: Madina, on the 3rd of Safar 57 AH (676 CE)

   Death: Died at the age of fifty-seven. Poisoned by the ruler Hisham ibn Abdel Malik ibn Marwan, on the 7th of Dhul al-Hijjah, 124 AH (733 CE). Buried in Al-Baqi cemetery, Madina.

   A man of great virtue and extensive knowledge, Imam Muhammad al-Baqir established the foundation of a grand university for Islamic studies in Madina. His pupils compiled books on different branches of science, jurisprudence, and arts under his instruction and guidance. A distinguished

scholar from Mecca, Ibn Ata once described him by saying, *"I never saw other scholars look as small as they did in the presence of Imam Muhammad al-Baqir."* One of his students, Muhammad ibn Muslim said, *"I asked al-Baqir all the questions that came to my mind (30,000 questions over a period of time), and he competently answered them all."*

6. *Jafar as-Sadiq*

   Father's name: Muhammad al-Baqir

   Mother's name: Lady Fatima bint al-Qasim

   Birth: Madina, on the 17th of Rabi al-Awwal, 83 AH (702 CE)

   Death: Died at the age of sixty-five. Poisoned by Abu Jafar al-Mansur, the Abbasid caliph on the 25th of Shawwal, 148 AH (765 CE). Buried in Al-Baqi cemetery, Madina.

   Imam Jafar as-Sadiq's father taught him the science of religion and the teachings of Islam. He became an authority for scholars and preachers and an expert in jurisprudence. After the martyrdom of his father, Imam as-Sadiq transformed the Prophet's mosque in Madina into a university from which to teach and expand upon Islamic theology. Imam Jafar as-Sadiq graduated hundreds of scholars who were versed in Islamic science and traditions of the Prophet. He also taught some of the founders of the various Islamic schools of jurisprudence. Scholars and preachers gave testimony, acknowledging Imam as-Sadiq's great knowledge of Islam. One scholar, Sibt ibn al-Jawzi said, *"Never have I seen scholars less knowledgeable in the presence of a man like Jafar as-Sadiq."* Men of knowledge and piety recognized the characteristics of Imam as-Sadiq in leadership, scholarship, and as an unprecedented educator.

The Imam was also a great social personality and an effective political force.

Imam as-Sadiq narrated thousands of traditions (*hadiths*), regarding every facet of life. He extensively discussed Islamic ethics, mannerism, integrity, goodness of character, and acts of worship. Additionally, he discussed jurisprudence and debated with leaders from various Islamic schools of thought.

7. *Musa al-Kadhim*

   Father's name: Imam Jafar as-Sadiq

   Mother's name: Lady Um-Hamida

   Birth: Abwa (an area between Mecca and Madina) on the 7th of Safar, 128 AH (746 CE)

   Death: Poisoned at the age of fifty-five on the 25th of Rajab, 183 AH (799 CE), and is buried in Baghdad, Iraq.

   Imam al-Kadhim was the most knowledgeable person of Islam during his time, and he was mainly known for his long prostrations to God. He was known as "al-Kadhim" which means "one who swallows his anger," for showing his extreme patience and forbearance, due to his resistance against the tyranny of the Abbasid Caliph, Harun. He was imprisoned for fourteen years in a hostile environment in Basra and Baghdad, and eventually murdered.

8. *Ali ar-Rida*

   Father's name: Imam Musa al-Kadhim

   Mother's name: Lady Najma

   Birth: Madina on 11th of Dhul Qadah, 148 AH (765 CE)

Death: Poisoned by the Abbassid Caliph on the last day of Safar, 203 AH (818 CE). Died at the age of fifty-three and is buried in Mashad, Iran.

Imam ar-Rida was summoned by the Abbassid Caliph, Mamoon, to the province of Khorasan, Iran to be crowned a prince as an attempt to quell the resistance of the caliph's dynasty. The Imam initially refused; but, he was then threatened with death. The Imam accepted conditionally, and proceeded to Iran and was eventually murdered there.

9. *Muhammad al-Jawad*

Father's name: Imam Ali ar-Rida

Mother's name: Lady Sabeeka

Birth: Madina, on the 10th of Rajab, 195 AH (811 CE)

Death: Poisoned by the Caliph, Al-Mutasim, at the age of twenty-four in the city of Baghdad on the last day of Dhul Qadah, 220 AH (835 CE).

At a very young age Imam al-Jawad was engaged in interfaith dialogue with the scholars of his time. Consequently, he became known among the people for his vast knowledge of Islam.

10. *Ali al-Hadi*

Father's name: Imam Muhammad al-Jawad

Mother's name: Lady Samanah

Birth: Madina on the 15th of Dhul Hijah, 202 AH (827 CE)

Death: Poisoned on the 3rd of Rajab, 254 AH (868 CE) at the age of forty-one and is buried in Samarra, Iraq.

During his time, Imam Ali al-Hadi remarkably surpassed others in human perfection, moral qualities, and generosity. He was summoned by the Abbasid Caliph, Al-Mutawakil to the city of Samarra which housed the military barricade of the Abbasid Dynasty. There, Imam al-Hadi was placed under house arrest and was later murdered.

11. *Hasan al-Askari*

    Father's name: Imam Ali al-Hadi

    Mother's name: Lady Jiddh

    Birth: The 10th of Rabiul Thani, 232 AH (846 CE)

    Death: Poisoned by the caliph of his time on the 8th of Rabiul Awal, 260 AH (874 CE), at the age of twenty-one in the city of Samarra, Iraq.

    Imam al-Askari physically and spiritually resembled his great grandfather, the Prophet. The Christians of the time looked upon him as sharing the same qualities as Prophet Jesus.

12. *Muhammad al-Mahdi*

    Father: Imam Hasan al-Askari

    Mother: Lady Nargis

    Birth: Samarra on 15th of Shaban, 255 AH (869 CE) and is still alive up to the present day.

    Imam al-Mahdi is the last of the imams, and it is with him that the line of succession to Prophet Muhammad ends. All Islamic schools of thought agree that at the end of time, Imam al-Mahdi will come to make justice prevail on earth after it is overwhelmed with injustice and tyranny.

The idea that humanity will be saved is not peculiar to the Islamic faith. It is also shared by other religions, such as Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, and Zoroastrianism.

Although the concept of Imam al-Mahdi being alive after nearly thirteen centuries seems unconceivable by some, the Quran sets several examples of prophets who are still living, such as Jesus and Elijah.[53] The Quran also gives two other examples in the story of the "companions of the cave"[54] and Uzayr.[55] The continuous existence of Imam al-Mahdi is considered one of the miracles of God, and Muslims believe in it as part of the unseen world.[56] Imam al-Mahdi, still lives in this world by the will of God, but he does not live in public view. However, toward the end of human civilization, when the world is filled with evil and injustice, Imam al-Mahdi will re-appear to restore order and allow justice to prevail.

- *Fatima al-Zahra*

Father's name: Prophet Muhammad ibn Abdullah

Mother's name: Lady Khadijah bint Khuwaylid

Birth: Mecca on the 20th day of Jumaadi al-Thani[57], 7 BH (614 CE) forty-five years after the birth of the Prophet.

Death: On the 3rd of Jumaadi al-Thaani, 11 AH (632 CE), at the age of eighteen, and buried in Medina.

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[53] See Quran 18:60-82.
[54] See Quran 18:25.
[55] See Quran 2:259.
[56] See Quran 2:3.
[57] Jumaadi al-Thaani is the sixth month of the Islamic calendar.

Although Lady Fatima al-Zahra is not considered as an imam, she is however, included in this list because of her high status and importance.

Lady Fatima was five years old upon the advent of Islam. Although the Prophet had several children, Fatima was his favorite. Fatima and her father, Prophet Muhammad had a unique bond. Aisha,[59] one of the wives of the Prophet said, *"I never saw a person who so resembled her father in speech, movements, and gestures more than Fatima, and when she went to visit her father, he would stand, take her hand, kiss it, and place her in his own seat."*[60] Lady Fatima was very loving and spiritually close to her father. The Prophet once said this about his daughter, *"Fatima is a part of me. Whoever angers her, angers me; and she is the mother of her father."*[61]

Lady Fatima carried the light of the message of the Prophet to the generations that were to come through her offspring [imams].

A chapter in the Quran was revealed about her in which God has said, *"Verily, We have granted you [Prophet Muhammad] al-Kawthar.*[63] *Therefore, turn in prayer to your Lord and sacrifice for Him. And he who makes you angry - he will be cut off from offspring."*

Lady Fatima was married to Imam Ali and had four children: Hasan, Husayn, Zaynab, and Um Kulthoom.

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[59] Aisha, daughter of Abu Bakr (the first caliph), and one of the wives of the Prophet.

[60] Feiruz Abadi, *Fadhaail al-Khamsa*, v.3 p.127.

[61] Sahih Bukhari, v.2 p.185; *Usud al-Ghaaba*, v.5 p.520.

[63] *Kawthar* is one of the names of Lady Fatima, as well as the name of a river in Paradise.

Lady Fatima was the perfect example of virtue and righteousness; an exemplary woman in Islam. She set many examples in her social and political life.

A few days after the demise of the Prophet, Lady Fatima died at the young age of eighteen.

The Family of the Prophet (The Ahlul Bayt)

The term *Ahlul Bayt* refers to the immediate family members of Prophet Muhammad: his daughter Fatima, cousin and son-in-law Ali, and grandchildren Hasan and Husayn. The purity of the Ahlul Bayt is spoken about in the Quran, *"Allah only wishes to remove all uncleanliness from you, O People of the House (Ahlul Bayt), and to purify you completely." (33:33)*

These five members and the nine imams which descend from Husayn are referred to as Ahlul Bayt; and all of them are considered to be infallible.

Near the end of Prophet Muhammad's life he said, *"It is probable that I will be called soon, and I will respond, so I leave behind me, for you, two weighty things: the Book of God [the Quran], and my Ahlul Bayt. Verily, God, the Merciful, the Aware, has informed me that these two will never be separated from each other until they meet me at the fountain in Heaven called Kawthar."*[64]

The Prophet also said, *"The parable of my Ahlul Bayt is similar to that of Noah's ark. Whoever embarks on it will certainly be rescued, but whoever opposes the boarding of it will surely be drowned."*[65]

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[64] Sahih Muslim, v.2 p.238 and Sahih Tirmithi, v.II p.220.

[65] *Mishkaat al-Masaabih*, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, p.523 and *Faraid al-Simtayn*, v.2 p.242.

As a statute, the prophets of God did not ask for any reward in compensation for the pain and suffering that they endured while attempting to guide mankind. In fact, this refusal to accept compensation can be seen as the mark of a prophet. The Quran states, *"Obey those who ask no reward from you and who have themselves received guidance." (36:21)* However, by the command of God, Prophet Muhammad made one slight exception; although the Prophet refused to accept anything for himself, he was commanded by God to say, *"I do not ask you for any reward except love for my relatives [the Ahlul Bayt]." (42:23)*

Imam Ali spoke about Ahlul Bayt as, *"We the Ahlul Bayt, possess the doors of wisdom and the light of governance. Be aware that the path of religion is one and its highways are straight. One who follows them achieves and secures the aim and objective; and one who stands away from them goes astray and incurs repentance."*[66] Further he said that the example of the descendants of Prophet Muhammad is like that of stars in the sky, "*when one star sets another one rises.*"[67]

The Prophet of Islam has stated, *"We are lights of the heavens and the earth and the ships of salvation. We are the repositories of knowledge, and toward us is the homecoming of all matters. Through our Mahdi (the final successor to the Prophet) all arguments shall be refuted, and he is the seal of the imams, the deliverer of the Muslim nation (ummah), and the extremity of the light. Happy are those who hold onto our handle and are brought together upon our love."*[68]

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[66] *Nahj al-Balagha* (The Peak of Eloquence), sermon #120.

[67] Ibid., sermon #100.

[68] Sibt ibn al-Jawzi, *Tadhkirat al-Khawass*, p.138.

V

THE DAY OF JUDGMENT AND THE RESURRECTION *(QIYAMA)*

There will be a time on earth when everything that God created will cease to exist. The day of resurrection will be the time when all of mankind will be brought back to their original physical form and every human being, from the past to the present, will be resurrected and examined by the deeds that they performed during their lifetime - this day is called the "Day of Judgment."

The Quran has devoted almost one-third of its verses to this event, and in one passage we read:

> *"O mankind! If you are in doubt concerning the resurrection, then verily, We created you from dust, then from a drop, then from a clot, then from a lump of flesh [both] shaped and shapeless, that We make it clear for you. And We cause what We will to remain in the wombs for an appointed time, and afterwards We bring you forth as infants: then you attain your full strength. And among you there is he who dies [young] and among you there is he who is brought back to the most abject time of life so that, after knowledge, he knows nothing. And you see the earth barren, but when We send down water on it, it thrills and swells and puts forth every lovely kind [of growth]. That is because Allah is Reality, and it is He Who gives life to the dead, and it is He Who has power over all things, and because the Hour [of Judgment] will come concerning which there is no doubt, and because Allah will raise those who are in the graves. (22:5-7)*

Regarding the Day of Judgment, God states, "*Verily We will give life to the dead, and We record all that they send before and that they leave*

behind, and We have taken account of all things in a clear Book [of evidence]." (36:12) Another verse informs us, *"And every soul will be paid in full for its deeds, and He knows best all that they do." (39:70)*

The number of verses in the Quran that deal with life after death and the Day of Resurrection is close to 1,200. This is in addition to a vast number of traditions related from Prophet Muhammad and the twelve imams. This number reveals the importance and significance of life after death and emphasizes that the life of a human being does not end with death, but in fact, continues afterward towards a new life. The Quran calls this life the "true life" as we read, *"The life of this world is nothing but diversion and play, but the abode of the Hereafter is indeed Life, had they known!"*[69]

Some people may wonder that if eventually mankind is going to die, then why were people created in the first place?

Humanity was created to be caretakers of the earth; thus, life on earth becomes a test, to maintain and preserve nature; and more importantly, to maintain and preserve our moral natures.

According to Islam, a person will be judged according to the actions that they performed in his or her life. If their deeds were primarily good, then they will enter Heaven (also called 'The Garden' or simply 'Paradise'). However, if one's deeds or actions are mainly evil, he or she will enter Hell (also referred to as 'The Fire'). On the Day of Judgment, everyone will know the fate of everyone else.

Both Heaven and Hell have different levels. The worst of people will be in the lowest depths of Hell, while the best of people will be in the highest parts of Heaven.

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[69] See Quran 29:64.

Death and the Life After Death

Through religious doctrine, humanity has been shown a glimpse of what we will experience at the moment of death and the life after death. The Quran reveals some of the secrets surrounding the soul, *"It is Allah who takes away the souls at the time of their death, and those that die not during their sleep. He keeps those souls for which He has ordained death and sends the rest for a term appointed. Verily, in this are signs for people who think deeply." (39:42)* In another verse, the spirit (soul) has been introduced in the following manner, *"And they ask you concerning the spirit. Say, 'The spirit, it is one of the things, the knowledge of which is only with my Lord, and of knowledge, you mankind have been given only a little.'" (17:85)*

For the believers, the departure of the soul will be peaceful, God says, *"It will be said to the pious: 'O you in complete rest and satisfaction! Come back to your Lord – you yourself well-pleased and also well-pleasing to Him! Enter then among my honored servants, and enter my Paradise.'" (89:27-30)*

The Quran reveals that a person who is near death will become aware that he or she is going to die. For those who are destined for Hell, the parting of the soul will be accompanied by severe pain. The moment of death is described in the Quran as, *"Nay! When the soul reaches the collarbone, and it will be said, 'Who can cure him and save him from death?' And he, the dying person, will conclude that it is the time of departing, and he is shrouded; the drive on that day will be to your Lord." (75:26-30)*

When the deceased is buried, the soul will accompany their physical body to the grave. The soul will then be questioned therein by two angels concerning their lifetime actions, deeds, and faith. The soul will then remain alongside the body.

Although the body will perish, the soul will remain living until the time of one's resurrection on the Day of Judgment.[70]

Islam believes that before the time of Resurrection and the Day of Judgment, the souls of people in their graves will either live in comfort or distress before ultimately entering Heaven or Hell. This abode is called *Barzakh*. The life of *Barzakh* can be described as a small form of paradise or hell. A person's faith, whether good or bad, will determine the atmosphere of *Barzakh,* namely, pleasant or unpleasant.[71]

Once, Prophet Jesus sent two messengers to the city of Antioch to call the people towards monotheism and the worshipping of the One God. One of the men of that town embraced the faith and followed the messengers. The king of the land ordered him to be killed. As the righteous man was dying he said, "*Verily I have believed in your Lord. So listen to me." When the disbelievers were about to kill him, he heard a voice which said: 'Enter paradise.' He said, "Would that my people knew what my Lord Allah has forgiven me and made me one of the honored ones." (36:25-27)* The paradise that the man had entered was the small form of paradise called *Barzakh*.

The descriptions of the small hell and the ultimate Hell are very vivid and painful in the Quran, and one description states, *"Evil torment encompassed the Pharaoh [and his people]—the fire: they are exposed to it morning and afternoon [in the Barzakh], and on the day when the Hour will be established [Hell]." (40:46)*

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[70] See Quran 56:1-56.

[71] Quran 36:26-27.

Repentance and Forgiveness

Repentance is the giving up of sin and it is the best way of expressing regret for having committed a sinful act. It involves sincerely regretting a particular sin and then resolving never to perform it again. Repentance is the source of and way to success, and in the Quran we are told, *"Turn to Allah, O believers, that you may be successful." (24:31)*

No matter how grievous a person's sin may be, God's forgiveness is much greater. No one should be ashamed to turn toward God in repentance for one's shortcomings, as God can erase the sins of whomever He pleases.

The Quran states, *"Say, O My servants who have transgressed against themselves, do not despair of the mercy of Allah; verily, Allah forgives all sins. Verily, He is the Forgiving, the Merciful." (39:53)*

Other verses which speak of God's infinite mercy include the following, *"Tell My servants that I am the Forgiving, the Merciful" (15:49); "Will they not turn to Allah and ask His forgiveness? Allah is the Forgiving, the Merciful" (5:74); "Your Lord is full of forgiveness for mankind in spite of their wrongdoing." (13:6)*

Despite God's ability to destroy mankind (if He so willed), God possesses the main characteristics of forgiveness and mercy. For this reason, Muslims begin nearly every action, speech, or endeavor with the words, *"In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate."*[72]

Repentance is of benefit now and security for the Hereafter. Prophet Muhammad narrated that the act of repenting brings an increase in wealth, protection from danger, and an easing of

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[72] *Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim.*

hardships and difficulties. Furthermore, it has been said that the fastest way to attain closeness to God is to humble oneself before Him and to admit ones wrongdoing. The benefits of repentance for the next life are obvious - entrance into Paradise and safety from the Hellfire.

Repentance will be accepted up until the moment of death. Prophet Muhammad once said that if a person seeks repentance one year before dying, God will accept the repentance; even if a person seeks repentance one day before dying, God will accept it; the Prophet then pointed to his throat and said that even if someone seeks repentance before his soul reaches here (pointing to his throat), even then God will accept it!

Nonetheless, repentance should be done as soon as possible and should not be delayed for surely no one knows how or when one will die. This point has been emphasized again and again in the Islamic traditions and in one such anecdote, Imam Ali has said, *"How numerous are the procrastinators who postpone [repenting and doing good deeds] until death overtakes them!"*[73]

Repentance should be done privately and secretly. People can establish a direct link to God while seeking repentance without the necessity of a third person interfering or even knowing about it. In fact, if a person commits a sin, he or she is not allowed to let others know about the sin! Prophet Muhammad once said to Imam Ali, *"O Ali, blessed is one whom Allah looks upon while one is weeping for a sin that none is aware of except Allah."*[74]

In addition to not revealing one's own sins, every person must conceal the faults of his brother or sister to preserve that

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[73] *Ghurar al-Hikm*, p.240.
[74] *Bihar al-Anwar*, v.77 p.63.

person's honor and the honor of society. That person's faults may be dealt with personally and privately, but it should not be spread among society.

God loves a person who sincerely repents for his or her sin; hence, the repented sin will be considered as if he or she had never committed that sin. Imam al-Baqir said, *"He who repents of his sins is as one who has not any burden of sin."*[75]

However, repentance must be sincere, and ultimately, it is only God who knows who is sincerely regretting his misdeeds and who is just speaking empty words.

A person came to Imam Ali and said, "*I seek God's forgiveness.*" The Imam replied, *"Do you know what asking God's forgiveness is? Forgiveness is a word that stands on six supports. The first is to repent over the past. The second is to make a firm determination never to revert to it. The third is to discharge all the rights of people so that you may meet God quite clean with nothing which to account for. The fourth is to fulfill every obligation which you ignored in the past so that you may now be just with it. The fifth is to aim at the flesh grown as a result of unlawful earning so that you may melt it by grief of repentance till the skin touches the bone and a new flesh grows between them. And the sixth is to make the body taste the pain of obedience as you previously made it taste the sweetness of disobedience. On such an occasion, you may say, 'I seek God's forgiveness.'"*[76]

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[75] *Wasail al-Shia*, v.16 p.74.
[76] *Nahj al-Balagha* (The Peak of Eloquence), sermon #426.

VI

ROOTS OF ISLAM

THE ISLAMIC PRACTICES

Islam is like a tree whose roots are its beliefs and whose branches are its practices. If the roots are not firm and healthy, then the tree will not survive; the roots only form the foundation of the tree.

Islamic practices are referred to as (as the branches of a tree) such because they are the ways in which the beliefs of Islam are transformed into reality. The different forms of outward worship translate a person's inner love and connection with God into a physical form.

Islam has ten fundamental practices which are the following:

1. Prayers (*Salaat*).
2. Fasting (*Sawm*).
3. *Khums* – the first form of almsgiving.
4. *Zakat* - the second form of almsgiving.
5. Pilgrimage to the city of Mecca (Hajj).
6. *Jihad* – a general interpretation of jihad means to struggle against immoral and unethical ways. On a personal level, it is to try to polish, enhance, and forbid things that can hurt or pollute oneself. On a broader scale it serves as a means to defend noble goals, such as the rights, dignity, and freedom of others.
7. Enjoining good (*Amr bil-Ma'rouf*).
8. Forbidding evil (*Nahi Anil Munkar*).

9. Supporting those who walk in the path of God (*Tawalla min Awliyah Allah*).
10. Turning away from the enemies of God (*Tabarra min A'daa Allah*).

VII

PRAYERS (*SALAAT*)

Prayers are the pillars of faith. Through prayer people establish communication and dialogue with God. It makes one become aware and realize that he or she is not alone in this universe and that each person has been created for a legitimate purpose. God created human beings to recognize and appreciate His grace and blessings.

The Necessity of Connection with the Absolute

The instinct to worship is an innate aspect of human beings - it is part of their natural disposition (*fitra*). Since the dawn of humanity, civilizations have worshipped the Creator in many different ways. The need for prayer is great, and a deep, strong, innate feeling within people drives them toward the Absolute Power to seek His help and assistance.

Just as the body needs food to survive and grow, the soul also needs its nourishment; and the food of the soul is prayer.

In order for people to receive their necessary spiritual nourishment, and to maintain a strong connection with God, Islam instructs Muslims to pray five particular prayers during the day. For example, the Quran states, *"Establish regular prayers from mid-day until the darkness of the night, and recite the Quran in the early dawn; verily, the recitation of the Quran in the early dawn is an act witnessed." (17:78-79)*

Islam has set five prescribed forms of prayers that must be completed everyday at five specific times. All the daily prayers consist of recitations from the Quran and various bodily movements.

People offer their prayers to God for many reasons; the first being the grandeur of the Creator. When one ponders and reflects upon the nature of the universe, and all the diverse and intricate matters that keep life in harmony, one would automatically conclude the existence of a mightier power - God. The Quran states, *"Truly, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the succession of night and day, there are signs for all who are endowed with insight, and who remember Allah standing and sitting and lying on their sides, and contemplate creation of the heavens and the earth, [saying]: 'Our Lord, You have not created this without meaning and purpose, limitless are You in Your subtle Glory!'" (3:191)*

When a Muslim prays, he or she is acknowledging the grandeur of God. Prayer is a serene and uninterrupted time of communicating and building a relationship with one's Creator. The recitation of the Islamic prayers encompasses a complete mental and spiritual concentration. It is a commitment not to leave the prayers aside. Those believers who establish prayers and show their devotion through them have mastered one of the foremost qualities of reverence toward God, *"Successful are the believers - those who offer their prayers with humility and submission ... and those who guard their five compulsory prayers. These are indeed the inheritors who shall inherit Paradise and abide therein forever." (23:1, 23:9-11)*

Prayers render moments of reflection and are a reminder of one's actions throughout the day. Prayers have significant benefits upon an individual, such as discouraging bad actions and seeking forgiveness, as the Quran states, *"Truly, prayer restrains from evil and shameful deeds." (29:45)* Prayers also keep one's perspective of life's ultimate meaning and goal always alive in the mind, as Imam Ali said, *"If a person who prays knew to what*

extent he was surrounded by God's mercy, he would never raise his head from prostration."[77]

The need to worship is as strong as the need to eat, and just as a person who lacks proper food will eat anything to put an end to the hunger, a person who does not find proper spiritual nutrition will be led to unlawful worshipping, such as the worship of animals, fire, stars, art, materialism, or anything else – things which have no power to aid nor harm him. Whether people have a structured religion or not, everyone worships something and everyone has an inner need to pray.

In society, whenever people meet others who they perceive to be at a high rank, such as celebrities, politicians, doctors, and scholars they show considerable respect for them, sometimes, at the expense of their own dignity. If people show this much respect for other human beings (who were also created like them from dust) then how much respect should they show before the Creator whose knowledge, superiority, and grandeur is limitless and eternal? Should they not, at least, stand before Him many times a day and bow in respect and gratitude?

Human beings must feel frail in front of God. If they try to act on their own, without the help of their Lord, they will be prone to failure because the source of all power and might is with God only. Those who accomplished great feats for humanity - scientists in the laboratory, soldiers in the battlefield, astronauts in space, doctors in the hospital - all sought assistance from their Lord before embarking on their adventures. Alone, human beings are inferior and in need of God, as the Quran states, *"O mankind! You are the ones who are in need of Allah, but Allah is free from all*

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[77] *Ghurar al-Hikm*, p.175.

needs, worthy of praise. If He wanted, He could destroy you and bring about a new creation, and that is not hard for Allah.” (35:15-17)

When a Society Ceases to Pray

Forsaking prayer is perilous, just as the Quran states, “*There has succeeded them a generation who have given up the prayers and followed their lusts, so they will be living in loss, in confusion and disarray...” (19:59)*

Details of the Five Prescribed Prayers

Preconditions

Before a Muslim can begin the daily prayers, there are some preconditions that must be fulfilled, which include the following:

Times

1. *The dawn prayer (Fajr):* This prayer must be done between the time the first ray of light appears in the sky until the time of sunrise.
2. *The noon prayer (Dhuhr):* The specific time for this prayer is right after the sun passes over its noon position. However, it can be done up until sunset.
3. *The afternoon prayer (Asr):* This prayer can be done any time after the noon prayer until sunset.
4. *The sunset prayer (Maghrib):* This prayer is to be performed after the sun sets at the time when the red sky on the eastern horizon disappears. Yet, it can be done up until midnight.
5. *The night prayer (Isha):* This prayer can be done any time after the sunset prayer and before midnight.

Direction *(al-Qiblah)*

During prayer, all Muslims must face the Kabah, the House of God, built by Prophet Abraham and his son Ishmael. The Kabah is located in the city of Mecca, in the Arabian Peninsula. One way to determine the precise direction of the prayer (called *al-qiblah*) is to use a compass. In North America, Muslims face northeast to locate the shortest path to Mecca.

Place

The place where a person is going to recite his or her prayer should either belong to that person or one must have permission to pray in that area (unless the place is a public one). The spot where the forehead touches the ground must be clean *(tahir)*, and free from any impurities, and prostration must be done on earth or inedible plants (including paper or wood).

Purity of the body

Just as the soul must be pure, concentrating on the Almighty and being in a state of complete calm before one can perform the prayers is essential, the body must also be free from impurities. Certain items are considered ritually impure and must be avoided, removed, or purified before the prayers. A specified washing (*wudhu*) must also be performed before the prayers as the Quran instructs, *"O you who believe, when you intend to offer prayers, wash your faces and your hands from the elbows to the fingertips. Rub [with wet hands] your heads and your feet up to the ankles, and if you are in a state of sexual impurity, purify yourself [by bathing your entire body]." (5:6)*

If water is unavailable, dust may be used out of necessity, just as the Quran explains, *"But if you are ill or on a journey and you come from the call of nature or have been in sexual contact with women and*

do not find water, then take clean sand and rub your faces and your hands. Allah does not want to place you in any difficulty, but He wants to purify you and to complete His favor upon you that you may be thankful.” (5:6)

Clothing

During prayer, a man must wear enough clothing to cover most of his body, and a woman must cover her entire body (including the head and hair), except for the face and hands. Clothing worn during prayer must be clean and lawfully obtained; it must not be stolen or borrowed without the owner’s permission.

The call to prayer (*adhaan*)

The call for prayer is highly recommended and is one of the distinguishing emblems of the Islamic faith. Whereas other religions use a bell or a musical instrument to call its faithful to pray, Islam instructs its followers to use the voice and to proclaim the prayer in this fashion.

The call to prayer consists of two parts: the *adhaan* and the *iqaama*. The *adhaan* is the general announcement to the prayers and instructs the believers to prepare for the beginning of the prayers while the *iqaama* is the specific proclamation that the prayers are just about to start.

The person reciting the *adhaan* should stand facing the direction of prayer and say:

Allahu Akbar **(4 times)**

Allah is the Greatest

Ashhadu an laa ilaaha illa Allah **(2 times)**

I testify that there is no god but Allah

Ashhadu anna Muhammadan-rasul Allah **(2 times)**

I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah

Ashhadu anna Alyan waliullah **(2 times)**

I testify that Ali is the friend of Allah[78]

Hayya 'alaas Salaah **(2 times)**

Hasten to prayer

Hayya 'alaal falaah **(2 times)**

Hasten to success

Hayya 'alaa khayril amal **(2 times)**

Hasten to the best of deeds

Allahu Akbar **(2 times)**

Allah is the Greatest

Laa ilaaha illa Allah **(2 times)**

There is no god but Allah

The *iqaama* should be said immediately before the prayer. It is identical to the *adhaan* with three exceptions:

1. The initial phrase, "*Allahu Akbar*," is only said twice.
2. The final phrase, "*La ilaaha illa Allah*," is said only once.

[78] This particular line is recommended not mandatory.

3. The phrase "*Qad qaamatis salaah*" which means "prayer is being offered" is said twice and is inserted after "*Hayya 'alaa khayril -amal* " which is repeated twice as well.

<u>The prayers</u>

Each of the prayers consists of a specific number of units *(rakat)*. The dawn prayer has two units, the noon and afternoon prayers each have four units, the sunset prayer has three units, and the night prayer has four units. The simplest prayer to learn is the two-unit dawn prayer, which will be described here.

Once all of the preconditions above have been fulfilled, and the person intending to offer the prayer is facing the proper direction (*qiblah*), and a sincere intention has been made for that particular prayer (in this case the dawn prayer), then the prayer may begin. The hands are raised up to be parallel to the ears with the palms facing the direction of prayer and the following is said:

Allahu Akbar

Allah is the Greatest

The hands are then put down again to the sides of the body or rested on the thighs and the first chapter of the Quran (*al-Fatiha*) is recited.

Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim.	In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate.
Al-hamdu lillaahi Rabb al'aalamin.	Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.
Ar-Rahman ar-Rahim.	The Merciful, the

	Compassionate.
Maaliki Yawm-id-Din.	Master of the Day of Judgment.
Iyyaaka na'budu wa iyyaaka nasta'in.	You alone do we worship, and from You alone do we seek help.
Ihdina-s-siraat al-mustaqim.	Guide us the straight path.
Siraat alladhina an'amta 'alayhim ghayr al-maghdubi 'alayhim wa laa adh-dhaalin.	The path of those whom You have blessed, not of those on whom is Your wrath, nor of those who have gone astray.

Next, another full chapter of the Quran must be recited. The example given below is the chapter entitled, "The Oneness of Allah."[79]

Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim.	In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate.
Qul huwa Allahu Ahad	Say, He is Allah, the One
Allahu-s-samad	Allah, the Eternal
Lam yalid wa lam yulad	He begets not, nor was He begotten

[79] *Al-Tawhid,* c.112.

Wa lam yakun lahu kufwaan Ahad.	And there is nothing comparable to Him.

At this point, "*Allahu Akbar*" should be said and the person should bow, placing the hands on the knees and keeping the back horizontal to the ground. While bowing, the following should be recited:

Subhaana Rabbi al-Athim wa bihamdih.	Glory be to my Lord, the Great, and praise be to Him.

Then, one must stand up straight again and in the standing position, the following should be said:

Sami'a Allahu liman hamidah.	Allah hears the one who praises Him.

Then "*Allahu Akbar*" is said, and the person prostrates (*sajdah*) on the ground. In *sajdah*, seven parts of the body must be on the ground, namely: the forehead, palms of both hands, knees, and tip of the big toes. The following must be said either once or three times:

Subhaana Rabbi al-a'laa wa bihamdih.	Glory be to my Exalted Lord, and praise be to Him

The person should then sit up on his or her knees, say "*Allahu Akbar*" and then say:

Astaghfirullaaha Rabbi wa atubu ilayh.	I seek forgiveness from Allah, my Lord, and turn towards Him.

Again, "*Allahu Akbar*" should be said and *sajdah* (as mentioned above) is repeated. Then, the person should sit up on his or her knees for a moment and say "*Allahu Akbar*" and then stand up and repeat the same process (*e.g.* recite the first chapter of the Quran; recite another chapter of the Quran, bow, and do the two *sajdahs*). Finally, sitting down again, the following must be said:

Ashhadu an laa ilaaha illa Allah, wahdahu la sharikalah wa ashhadu anna Muhammadan, abdahu warasuluh.	I testify that there is no god but Allah, alone without associate, and that Muhammad is His servant and messenger.
Allahumma salli 'alaa Muhammadin wa aal-i Muhammad.	O Allah, bless Muhammad and the family of Muhammad.
Assalaamu 'alayka ayyuha an-nabiy wa rahmatullahi wa barakaatuhu.	Peace be upon you, O Prophet, and the mercy of Allah and His blessings.
Assalaamu 'alayna wa 'alaa 'ibaad allahi-s-saalihi.	Peace be upon us, and upon all the righteous Servants of Allah.
Assalaamu 'alaykum wa rahmatullahi wa barakaatuhu.	Peace be upon you, and the mercy of Allah, and His blessings.

It is recommended that "*Allahu Akbar*" be pronounced three times by raising the hands to be parallel to the ears.

This action concludes the two-unit prayer. However, it is recommended to follow the prayers with supplications or other recitations.

VIII

FASTING (*SAWM*)

Almost every religion has adopted some form of fasting. Prophet Muhammad and the prophets before him all called upon their followers to fast, as the Quran states, *"O you who believe! Fasting has been prescribed for you just as it was prescribed for those before you so that you may be pious and learn self-restraint." (2:183)*

Fasting in Islam requires complete abstinence from food, drink (including water), smoking, and sexual activity from dawn until the time of the evening prayer (just after sunset).

Although fasting is recommended on some other significant Islamic dates, it is however, required every day during the month of Ramadan which is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. The month of Ramadan is revered and honored by all Muslims and it was during this month on a particular night called the "Night of Destiny" (*Laylatul Qadr*), that the Quran was revealed to the Noble Prophet.

Muslims believe that on this night, every year, God determines the fate of every person for the year to come. Therefore, worshipping on the Night of Destiny is considered, *"Better than a thousand months." (97:3)*

Although the exact night of the Night of Destiny is not known, Islamic scholars approximate the date to fall on either the 19th, 21st, 23rd, 25th, or 27th of the month of Ramadan. Therefore, Muslims copiously worship God on these specific nights. The Quran states, *"Verily, We have sent it [Quran] down on the Night of Destiny; and what will make you know what the Night of Destiny is? The Night of Destiny is better than a thousand months; He sends down the*

angels, and the Spirit during it by His will for every matter; Peace! Until the rising of the dawn." (97:1-7)

As with prayers, the benefits of fasting are innumerable. Fasting strengthens one's willpower, teaches discipline, encourages sympathy for the poor, breaks harmful habits, strengthens one's health, and establishes a sense of religious brotherhood and sisterhood. However, the strongest benefits are spiritual.

Lady Fatima al-Zahra, the daughter of Prophet Muhammad said, *"Fasting is to deepen and strengthen one's faith."*

Fasting sharpens the spiritual awareness and inspires a sense of gratitude towards God.

Apart from refraining from food and drink, Muslims are also encouraged, during the month of Ramadan, to give additional charity to the poor and the needy and to feed other people.

IX

ALMSGIVING (ZAKAT AND KHUMS)

The act of sharing and providing others who are less fortunate is not only mandated upon Muslims but it is also considered one of the noblest acts that can bring a person closer to God. Giving charity benefits the individual and society; it purifies the soul from stinginess and meanness.

The Quran says, *"Take alms from their wealth in order to purify and sanctify them." (9:103)* From a moral perspective, the obligation to pay the obligatory charities is no less important than the obligation to pray. Whenever the Quran refers to people who pray, it also refers to people who pay their obligatory dues.

Charity is not considered as a gift to the poor, but rather a right of the poor. The Quran states, *"And in their properties [fortunate ones] is the right of the beggar and the destitute." (51:19)*

Every monetary or material possession that people acquire comes through the generosity of God. Mary, the mother of Jesus was known to have received her sustenance unconditionally from the Almighty One, *"Every time Zachariah entered the sanctuary to visit her, he found her supplied with sustenance. He said, 'O Mary! From where did you get this?' She said, 'This is from Allah;' verily, Allah provides sustenance to whomever He wills without limit." (3:37)*

Although people must work to earn a living, God is the One who determines the amount and the form of sustenance they will receive throughout their lifetime. Therefore, when people are directed to return some of their wealth toward charity, in reality they are not relinquishing their own property, but merely returning what God has lent them. God has said, *"O you who believe! Spend out of what We have provided for you," (2:254)* and in

another part of the Quran we read, *"Surely those who recite the Book of Allah and keep up prayer and spend out of what We have given them secretly and openly hope for a gain which will not perish." (35:29)*

The supply of provision and sustenance not only applies to mankind but all kingdoms of God's creation (i.e., animal and plant). The Quran says, *"Many are the creatures that carry not their own provision; but Allah provides for them and for you." (29:60)*

Money that comes from obligatory charities (*zakat* and *khums*) provides security and dignity within society by providing for the needy, bridging the gap between the rich and poor, and eliminating poverty.

The money collected is used for food, shelter, education, health care, orphanages, libraries, transportation systems, and other public services.

A community in which everyone pays their dues (*zakat* and *khums*) will be successful and a community in which people do not pay the *zakat* and *khums* will fall apart. Prophet Muhammad said, *"My community will continue to live fairly if they are faithful to one another, return deposits to their owners, and give alms [zakat] to the poor. But if they do not fulfill these duties, then they will encounter famine and scarcity."*[81]

Imam Ali has stated, *"God, the Glorified, has fixed the livelihood of the destitute in the wealth of the rich. Consequently, whenever the destitute remain hungry, it is because some rich people have denied him his share."*[82]

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[81] *Wasa`il al-Shia*, v.6 p.13.

[82] *Nahj al-Balagha* (The Peak of Eloquence).

In another saying in regards to charity, we are told, *"When charity is delivered out of the hand of its owner, it says four things: at first, I was perishing and you gave me life; I was insignificant and you made me great; I was an enemy and you turned me into a friend; You used to protect me then, but now I will protect you up until the Day of Resurrection."*[83]

These traditions and legislations only refer to obligatory almsgiving; however, there is, in addition to the required alms, a voluntary charity of any kind, such as money, words, or deeds.

Voluntary charity is called *sadaqah*. Like *zakat* and *khums*, these benefit both the individual and the society. Prophet Muhammad said, *"Give charity and cure your sick people by it because charity can surely remove your bad fortunes and ailments, and it causes prolongation of your lifetime and increases your rewards."*[84]

Specifics of the *Zakat* and *Khums*

1. *Zakat* is a type of almsgiving that must be paid yearly on the following items, if they are possessed in sufficient quantities: wheat, barley, dates, raisins, gold, silver, camels, cows, and sheep.
2. *Khums* is an excess profit that is taxed. It is 20% that is paid yearly on the excess profit that a person acquires. Excess profit refers to the profit that remains after a person has paid for food, clothing, shelter, and other living necessities for oneself and the immediate family. It is advisable that *khums* be given to a religious authority so that it can be distributed in the appropriate way.

[83] *Al-Ithna Ashariyyah*, p.23.
[84] *Kanzal-Ummal*, v.6 p.31.

> *Khums* must also be paid on six other items, one of them being gems obtained while diving. However, this case in modern society tends to be rare.

Khums has been ordained in the Quran in the following verse in which God has said, *"And know that whatever profit you may attain, one fifth of it is assigned to Allah and the Messenger, and to the near relatives [of the Messenger] and the orphans, the destitute, and the wayfarer, if you have believed in Allah and that which We sent down to our servant [Muhammad]." (8:41)*

X

PILGRIMAGE TO THE CITY OF MECCA (HAJJ)

Every Muslim who is able, must make the Hajj (pilgrimage) to the city of Mecca at least once in his or her lifetime. This pilgrimage occurs every year during *Dhul Hijjah* the 11th and 12th months of the Islamic lunar calendar. Those who make the pilgrimage are following the footsteps of Prophet Abraham, who is known as "the father of the prophets."

Four thousand years ago, Prophet Abraham along with his wife, Hagar, and his son, Ishmael set out on a long journey wandering through Babylon, Syria, and Arabia. They crossed vast hills, rivers, and deserts until they arrived in the land of Mecca where Prophet Abraham received a revelation from God, as the Quran states, *"And remember when we showed Abraham the site of the House saying ... Do not associate with Me anything, and purify My house for those who circle around it and stand to pray and bow and prostrate themselves. And proclaim among the people the pilgrimage. They will come to you on foot and on every lean camel from every remote path that they may witness the benefits for them and mention the name of Allah during the appointed days over what He has given them."* (*22:26-28)*

Prophets Abraham and Ishmael were instructed by God to raise the cubic structure called the Kabah. According to the Quran, it is the *"First house (of worship) made for mankind." (3:95)* Its original foundation was built at the dawn of creation by Prophet Adam. Prophet Abraham was then ordered to proclaim the pilgrimage to mankind. Perplexed as to who would hear his voice in the desert land of Mecca, Abraham climbed to the top of a nearby mountain and proclaimed to humanity the Divine message of the Hajj. This call has passed through the distance of time, and it still

reverberates to the millions of Muslims around the globe who answer God's call to make the pilgrimage every year.

Significance of the Hajj

The Hajj is the supreme symbol of universal brotherhood, and it is the greatest annual congregation in the world. Every year in Mecca, over two million Muslims from diverse origins stand shoulder-to-shoulder, clad in the barest of materials (two pieces of white cloth) and perform the same rituals. Not one person can be distinguished from another on the basis of wealth, lineage, or power. The most powerful leaders are on the same level as the poorest of men. All artificial or human-imposed distinctions among mankind are lifted, and for the span of a few days, people have the opportunity to know each other solely as brothers and sisters in humanity.

The Hajj also develops the human soul. Every human being (whether aware of it or not) is traveling towards God, and the essential part of this spiritual development in life is to recognize the returning journey. The Hajj not only represents a physical journey, but it also compels the pilgrim to demonstrate one's willingness to leave behind everything in his or her life for the sake of God.

God has made it known that one of the ways to approach Him for forgiveness is to journey to His emblematic house - the Kabah in Mecca.

Imam Ali was once was with a group of his followers in the vicinity of the Kabah when they saw a man holding the cloth cover of the Kabah while supplicating, *"O Keeper of the House! This house is Your house, and this guest is Your guest. Each guest sees goodness from its host. Tonight, let Your goodness be the forgiving of my*

sins." Imam Ali asked his followers, *"Did you hear the words of this man?"* They said, *"Yes, we did."* Imam Ali replied, *"Almighty God is more forgiving than to drive away His guests."*

The sense of equality and humanity that is present during the Hajj should be reflected in one's own everyday life. A person who has experienced the Hajj should return home freed from the erroneous notions of race and class distinction that are prevalent in some societies.

Since the advent of Islam, the Hajj has been one of the major unifying cultural factors for Muslims, and for many Muslims, the Hajj serves as an enormous convention or conference in which information is exchanged and problems are solved. This is based on the fact that every year Muslim delegates from every civilization meet in one place to discuss and try to solve the challenges facing the Muslims throughout the world.

The Rites of the Hajj

The beginning of the pilgrimage is marked by proclaiming, "*Labbayk, Allahumma, Labbayk,*" which means, "I am here, O Lord, I am here!" This is then followed by, "You, Who have no partner - I am here! Surely all praise and blessings are Yours, and the Kingdom - I am here, O Lord, I am here!"

During the Hajj, millions of pilgrims who are present engage in circling the Kabah *(tawaf)*. The pilgrim's circling *(tawaf)* around God's metaphorical house symbolizes one's dependence and needed assistance of the Almighty. The circumnavigating *(tawaf)* also illustrates how one's ultimate being constantly revolves around God.

After *tawaf*, the pilgrims hasten between two small mountains of Safa and Marwa. This rite re-enacts Hagar's search for water for

her infant son Ishmael. Alone in the desert, Hagar and her baby were in desperate need for water. She ran back and forth seven times desperately looking for some hint of moisture in the desert sands. Seeing Hagar's effort, God produced for her the spring of Zam Zam - a spring of cool, pure water which gushed forth at Ishmael's feet and continues to flow until this very day. By imitating Hagar's search, the pilgrims remember her plight, but also assimilate a message within themselves that they cannot sit and wait for God's blessings to unfold magically upon them. Rather, if people are in need of something, they should work hard for it and hope for the munificence of God.

The most significant day of the pilgrimage is the Day of Arafat. Arafat is a desert outside the city of Mecca in which all the pilgrims must be present from noon to sunset to commune with God. The time spent in Arafat marks the real essence of the Hajj, just as Prophet Muhammad said, *"The Hajj is Arafat."* In Arafat, pilgrims leave behind all material possessions except for the two pieces of cloth worn during their pilgrimage—a symbol of returning to the same condition in which one was wrapped in at birth and will be clothed in at the time of death.

The vast gathering consists of millions of people all dressed alike, standing in the same place, at the same time - this surely represents the true origin and fate of humanity! We are created from dust, then we live for a short while, we die and become dust and in the end we are resurrected from dust again.

The scene of Arafat resembles what the Day of Resurrection will be like - countless individuals will be pieced back together from dust to withstand the judgment of God.

Following Arafat, the pilgrims head to a place called Mina, which is on the outskirts of Mecca; and it is here that the pilgrims throw pebbles at three stone pillars symbolizing Satan.

For the pilgrims, this act demonstrates their continuous struggle of fighting against Satan, who is the sworn enemy of mankind. This act of the pebble throwing is also another historical re-enactment of Prophet Abraham and Ishmael's sacrifices for God.

Abraham, along with his son Ishmael were on their way to fulfill the command of God; namely the slaying of Ishmael by his father. Prophet Abraham encountered Satan three times disguised as a man, and attempted to discourage Prophet Abraham from carrying out God's orders. Instead of listening to Satan's dissuasions, Prophet Abraham threw stones at him three times at three different areas.

At the end of the Hajj, on *Eid al-Adha*, each pilgrim must sacrifice an animal similar to what Prophet Abraham did in lieu of his son. The sacrifice denotes the pilgrim's willingness to adhere to God's commandments unconditionally. The meat of the animal must not be wasted; one-third may be kept for personal consumption, and the other two-thirds should be divided equally among friends and the indigent.

XI

STRIVING (JIHAD)

The literal meaning of *jihad* is "to strive." More importantly, it means to progress in all aspects of one's life. Although the word jihad is used by the Western media with militant connotations, in truth, it covers a vast range of human activity, such as family life, work, spiritual development, and justified military defense.

The most important jihad is the struggle to purify one's soul, and this jihad far outweighs any military jihad.

Prophet Muhammad once met a group of soldiers returning home from a defensive battle and said, *"Welcome to the people who have concluded the minor jihad [struggle]."* Astonished, the soldiers asked, *"Was this [military battle] a minor jihad? Then what is the major jihad?"* Prophet Muhammad replied, *"The major jihad is the jihad to purify one's self."*

The beginning steps of jihad are to purify the soul by restraining one's self from committing sins that corrupt the soul. One must control material desires, overt selfishness, and remain uninfluenced by forces (internal or external) that distract one from the remembrance of God. All the forms of worship in Islam, such as the prayers, fasting, and charity exist as a means to purify and perfect the soul. Only in the upward development of the soul will one find happiness in this life and in the next life. If the soul is unhappy, a person will be miserable, regardless of how materially wealthy he or she may be. The Quran says, *"And by the soul and Him Who perfected it, then showed it what is right and what is wrong for it—indeed, he succeeds who purifies his soul, and, indeed, he fails who corrupts his soul." (91:7)* The soul is the essence of mankind; it is the element that will outlast this life and be judged

in the next. One of the primary reasons mankind was placed in this world is to test them and develop their souls.

However, jihad also refers to the legitimate struggle to defend human rights, such as personal and religious freedom, as well as the defense of land, property, and family as the Quran notes, *"Permission [to fight] is given to those against whom war is being wrongfully and offensively waged, and surely Allah is able to give them victory. Those who have been expelled from their homes unjustly, only because they said, 'Our Lord is Allah...'" (22:39-40)*

When people are being oppressed, Islam commands the believers to defend the rights and integrity of the people. Fighting in the form of defense is not only permitted, but it is required. The Quran explains, *"Fight against aggressors until oppression is stopped." (2:193)* Thus, jihad, as a form of fighting, must be for just causes and to defend the freedom, liberty, and integrity of society as the Quran extols, *"And why do you not fight in the way of Allah and the utterly oppressed men, women, and children who are crying out, "O Lord! Rescue us from this town whose people are oppressors, and raise for us from You, one who will protect; and raise for us from You, one who will help." (4:75)*

Peaceful countries today could not have achieved their stature without a campaign for independence or a struggle for freedom. Furthermore, such countries could not have retained their positions without a strong force. In life, struggle will always exist between good and evil, truth and falsehood, and societies cannot progress if oppressors are left unchallenged.

XII

ENJOINING GOOD AND FORBIDDING EVIL

(*AMR BIL-MA'ROUF WA NAHI ANIL MUNKAR*)

"Let there arise from you a group of people inviting what is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong; these are the ones who will be successful." (3:104)

In order for religion to progress and for society to flourish, people must initiate, advise, and attempt to guide each other toward righteousness by deterring each other away from misconduct. This action is mandatory for those who believe in God and the Day of Judgment. Giving sincere advice is not, as some may argue, meddling in someone else's business; rather it is a valuable favor and one of the best forms of charity.

XIII

SUPPORTING THOSE WHO WALK IN THE PATH OF GOD

(*TAWALLI LI AWLIYAA' ALLAH*)

This entire phrase means to be a friend and a helper of the righteous and pious people who maintain religion and believe in God. Specifically, it is directed to the prophets and imams (successors to the prophets), as well as those who work to establish order, justice, and religion on earth, as the Quran notes,

"And whoever takes Allah, His messenger, and those who have belief as protectors and guardians, then the party of Allah will be victorious." (5:56)

XIV

TURNING AWAY FROM THE ENEMIES OF GOD

(TABAARI MIN A'DAA ALLAH)

This phrase refers to the opposite of *tawalli li awliyaa' Allah*. Those who sincerely believe in God must dissociate themselves from those people who obstruct truth and justice and prevent the light of God from reaching others. The Quran states, "*Allah does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against you on account of religion and did not drive you out of your homes. Verily, Allah loves those who deal with equity. It is regarding those who fought against you on account of religion and have driven you out of your homes and helped to drive you out that Allah forbids you to befriend them, and whoever will befriend them, then such are the wrongdoers." (60:8-9)*

Another passage of the Quran reads, "*O you who believe, take not for protectors and helpers those who take your religion as a mockery and fun from among those who received the scriptures before you, or from among the disbelievers, and fear Allah if you indeed are true believers." (5:57)*

A final quotation instructs the believers, "*Let not the believers take the disbelievers as supporters and helpers and friends instead of the believers. And whoever does that will never be helped by Allah in any way." (3:28)*

It is for the benefit of believers that God warns them about not associating themselves with unbelievers, tyrants, and enemies of God and mankind.

XV

RELIGIOUS TEXTS

The Quran

The Quran is the last in a series of Divinely revealed books (others include the Torah and the Gospel) revealed by God to mankind through the prophets. Revealed to Prophet Muhammad over a period of twenty-three years and consisting of 114 chapters, the length of the Quran is comparable to that of the New Testament.

The revelations were written by a group of people appointed by the Prophet; and Imam Ali first compiled the Quran into a book form after the Prophet's death.

The Quran sheds light on many different aspects of life - legal, moral, social, political, economic, philosophical, mystical, and scientific, in addition to stories of previous prophets. God says, "*We have sent down to you the Book as an exposition of everything - a guidance, a mercy, and glad tidings for those who have submitted themselves to Allah as Muslims.*" *(16:89)*

Less rigid than prose, but more beautiful than poetry, its peculiar melody transcends all other forms of linguistic sounds and writings.

The Quran speaks only the truth, and its directives are universal for all places, situations, and times. It is the completion of the earlier revelations, and it is the only Divine revelation that exists in its original unchanged form. God says, "*Verily, it is We who have sent down the Quran, and surely We will guard it from corruption.*" *(15:9)* From the time of the Prophet until today, not one phrase of

the Quran has been edited, altered, added, omitted, lost, distorted, or otherwise changed.

The Quran plays an important role in Muslim life. It constantly reminds Muslims of their duties, rights, obligations, and ultimate destiny. Muslims are invited to study, memorize, ponder, and reflect on the Quran, and then to implement its teachings into their everyday lives. The chapters of the Quran contain the supreme divine wisdom that is meant for all seekers of truth - ordinary people, scholars, specialists, old, young, Muslims, and non-Muslims alike. It addresses all of mankind. Verses in the Quran attest to this fact by beginning with the words, "*O mankind!*" The Quran satisfies people with its symphony of words, science, narrations and intellectual discourse, and fascinates the reader with its vast richness and depth.

Science and the Quran

Many scientific facts and realities are present in the Quran; and this holy scripture has proven not to contradict science. The creations of the embryological features are described vividly in the Quran. A careful comparison of this verse with the actual details of embryological development will reveal no contradictions, "*And indeed We created man out of an extract of clay. Thereafter, We made him as mixed drops of the male and female fluids and lodged him in a safe lodging [womb of the mother]. Then We made the mixed drops into a clot [a piece of thick coagulated blood]. Then We made the clot into a little lump of flesh. Then We made out of that little lump of flesh bones. Then We clothed the bones with flesh. And then We brought it forth as another creation. So blessed be Allah, the best of creators.*" *(23:12-14)*

The creation of life, the earth, and the astronomical universe is also described in a way that parallels modern scientific theory.

Many of the Quranic chapters are named after astronomical objects, such as the "Star"[85] and the "Sun."[86]

In terms of the workings of the universe, we read the following Quranic passage, *"Do not those who disbelieve know that the heavens and the earth were joined together as one united piece, and then We parted them? And We have made from water every living thing. Will they then not believe? And We have placed on the earth firm mountains, lest it should shake with them, and We placed therein-broad highways for them to pass through that they may be guided, and We have made the heaven a roof, safe, and well guarded. Yet they turn away from its signs. And He it is Who has created the night and the day, and the sun and the moon, each in an orbit floating." (21:30-33)*

Yet further instruction is given in the Quran of the mechanisms of the universe, *"By the sun and its brightness, and by the moon as it follows it, and by the day as it shows up in the sun's brightness, and by the night as it conceals it, and by the heavens and Him who built it, and by the earth and Him who spread it..." (91:1-6)*

Although the people during the Prophet's time knew nothing about the sciences of the sun and stars, the Quran refers to the fact that stars exist for a fixed period of time, *"And the sun runs on its fixed course for a term appointed. That is the decree of the Almighty, the Omniscient. And the moon, We have measured for it mansions to traverse until it returns like the old dried curved date-stalk. It is not for the sun to overtake the moon, nor does the night outstrip the day. They all float in (their own) orbit." (36:38)*

Human beings are asked to ponder on the creation of the universe and consider their role therein, *"Truly, in the creation of*

[85] *An-Najm*, chapter 53.
[86] *Ash-Shams*, chapter 91.

the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day there are indeed signs for all who are endowed with insight, and who remember Allah standing, sitting, and lying on their sides, and contemplate creation of the heavens and the earth, [saying] 'O Lord! You have not created all this without purpose! Glory be to You'." (3:191)

The Quran also poses a rhetorical question and asks,*"Are you more difficult to create or the heavens above?" (79:27)*

Even the expansion of the universe is alluded to, *"With power did We construct the heavens; verily, We are able to expand the vastness of space thereof." (51:47)*

The end of this universe is also described, *"And remember the day when We will roll up the heavens like a scroll rolled up for books. As We began the first creation, We shall repeat it. It is a promise binding upon Us. Truly, We shall do it." (21:104)*

Another phase of the end of the world tells us, *"When the sun has wound around and lost its light and has been overthrown, and when the stars shall fall, and when the mountains shall be made to pass away...And when the seas shall become a blazing far or shall overflow." (81:1-3 & 6)*

Such descriptions continue in the Quran, *"When the Heaven is cleft asunder, and when the stars have fallen and scattered, and when the seas have burst forth..." (82:1-3)*

This event will come to pass, as the Quran testifies, *"When the Event befalls - and there can be no denying its befalling - it will bring down some, and others it will exalt. When the earth will be shaken with a terrible shaking, and the mountains will be powdered to dust so that they will become floating dust particles." (56:1-6)*

And as for the Earth and its outcome, *"And they ask you concerning the mountains. Say, "My Lord will blast them and scatter them as*

particles of dust; then He shall leave it as a smooth, level plain. You will see therein nothing crooked or curved." (20:105-107)

The Qualities of the Quran in the words of Imam Ali

The cousin of the Prophet Muhammad and his successor, Imam Ali has spoken of the lofty status of the Quran in the following manner:

> *And know that this Quran is an adviser who never deceives, a leader who never misleads, and a narrator who never speaks a lie. No one will sit beside this Quran but that when he rises he will achieve one addition or one diminution—addition in his guidance and elimination in his [spiritual] blindness. You should also know that no one will need anything after [guidance from] the Quran and no one will be free from want before [guidance from] the Quran. Therefore, seek cure from it for your ailments and seek its assistance in your distresses. It contains a cure for the biggest diseases, namely, unbelief, hypocrisy, revolt, and misguidance. Pray to God through it and turn to God with its love. Do not ask the people through it. There is nothing like it through which the people should turn to God, the Sublime."*[87]

Supplications to God (*Dua*)

The word dua itself means "to call out to God." Supplications and prayers (*dua*) focus on the idea that human beings are in constant need of God. Even those who reach the peak of wealth, knowledge, strength, and dignity still are in need of God.

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[87] *Nahj al-Balagha* (The Peak of Eloquence), sermon #176.

Dua is of equal importance to people inflicted by calamities and hardships, as well as to those living in comfort and abundance.

Speaking with God through *dua* defends oneself against adversity and tribulation, and leads one to salvation and relief. Islam encourages its followers to offer *dua* constantly, either using their personal words - directly from the heart, or repeating some of the inspirational words of the Prophet and his successors [imams] that have been handed down to us.

God has given a guarantee in the Quran to His servants that He will answer their prayers, *"And your Lord says, "Call upon me, I will answer your prayer." (40:60)*

Elsewhere in the Quran, He says, "When My servants ask you concerning Me, I am indeed close to them. I listen to the prayer of every suppliant when he calls upon Me. Let them also with a will listen to My call and believe in Me, that they walk in the right way." (2:186)

Dua Kumayl[88]

A man named Kumayl ibn Ziyad once asked Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib for a way to approach God. In response, Imam Ali gave him a touching prayer and told him to recite it every day if he could, or once a week, or once a year - and if reciting it once a year was too difficult then to recite it at least once in his lifetime. This prayer became known as *"Dua Kumayl"* (the prayer of Kumayl). Many Muslims recite this supplication once a week on Thursday night.

"In the name of Allah, the Most Infinitely Merciful, the Most Compassionate.

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[88] An example of an Islamic supplication.

O Allah, I ask You by Your Mercy which embraces all things.

By Your Strength, through which You dominate all things, toward which all things are humble, and before which all things are lowly.

By Your Invincibility, through which You overwhelm all things.

By Your Might, which nothing can resist.

By Your Greatness, which has filled all things.

By Your Power, which towers over all things.

By Your Face, which subsists after annihilation of all things.

By Your Names, which have filled the foundations of all things.

By Your Knowledge, which encompasses all things; and

by the Light of Your Face, through which all things are illuminated!

O Light! O All-Holy!

O First of the first and Last of the lLast!

O Allah, forgive me those sins which tear apart safeguards!

O Allah, forgive me the sins which bring down adversities!

O Allah, forgive me the sins which alter blessings!

O Allah, forgive me the sins which hold back supplication!

O Allah, forgive me the sins which dash all hopes!

O Allah, forgive me the sins which bring about tribulation!

O Allah, forgive me every sin I have committed and every mistake I have made!

O Allah, verily I seek nearness to You through remembrance of You, I seek intercession from You with Yourself, and I ask You through Your

Munificence, to bring me nearer to Your Mercy, to bless me with gratitude to You and to inspire me with Your remembrance."

XVI

OTHER ISLAMIC ISSUES

Leadership of the Muslims after Prophet Muhammad

In every aspect of life, a form of leadership exists, whether it is in the workforce, education, government, family or religious institutes. The Quran emphasizes the role and significance of leadership in Islam and God states, *"And remember the day on which we will call together all human beings with their leaders [imams]." (17:71)*

Throughout his mission of propagation of the message of Islam, Prophet Muhammad had on several occasions named a successor who would lead after him; and more importantly, this commandment to name his successor came from God. God commanded the Prophet, *"O Prophet! Proclaim what has been revealed to you from your Lord [the succession of Imam Ali], for if you do not, you will not have conveyed His message, and Allah will protect you from the people." (5:67)* This historical revelation came upon the Prophet at a major crossroad between Mecca and Madina, called Ghadeer Khum.

The Prophet had just concluded making his first (and only) Hajj and was returning home, along with over 100,000 pilgrims, when he received the command by God to appoint Imam Ali as his immediate successor at his death.

After the Prophet had revealed the command before the people, the Quran then concluded with its last and final verse, *"This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed my favor on you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion." (5:3)* All of the companions of the Prophet paid personal allegiance to Imam Ali and accepted him as the caliph after the Prophet.

However, seventy days after the monumental event, Prophet Muhammad left this world.

Disarray overtook some Muslims regarding who should succeed the Prophet as leader of the Muslim community. There were two main groups; one that consisted of the family of the Prophet (Bani Hashim) and prominent companions, and the other being a small group of companions of the Prophet.

The first group believed that the Muslim leadership had already been established by Divine ordinance[89] which had been reiterated by the Prophet time and time again.[90] This group later became known as the "*Shia*[91] *of Ali*."

The second group believed that the Prophet left the issue of succession open to the Muslim community to decide the leadership based on the concept of consultation *(shura)*. Members of the second group had suggested that Imam Ali was too young (at the time of the death of the Prophet Muhammad, he was 33) to assume leadership. In addition, in their opinion, prophethood and succession (caliphate) should not be vested in one family.

In a hasty meeting at Saqifah Bani Sa'ida, Abu Bakr ibn Abi Quhafah assumed leadership (11 AH - 13 AH / 632 CE – 634 CE). After Abu Bakr's death, Umar ibn al-Khattab (13 AH – 23 AH / 634 CE - 644 CE) assumed leadership; followed by Uthman ibn Affan (23 AH – 35 AH / 644 CE - 656 CE). Afterwards, Ali ibn Abi Talib (35

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[89] Quran 5:67, 26:214, 5:55, 4:59.
[90] Sahih Bukhari, *Book on Outstanding Traits*, hadith #3430; Battles hadith #4064; Sahih Muslim, *Book of the Merits of the Companions*, hadith #4418; Al-Tirmidhi, *Book on Outstanding Traits*, #3664; ibn Majah, *Book on the Introduction*, 112 and 118; Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal 1:173, 175, 177, 179, 182, 184, and 185.
[91] The literal meaning of Shia is 'followers'.

AH – 40 AH / 656 CE - 661 CE) After the caliphate of Ali, two dynasties followed - the Umayyad and the Abbasid.

Social Life in Islam

Islam places tremendous emphasis on the social aspects of life. Islamic practices are not only confined to the spiritual dimensions, but also to the social environment. For example, Islam encourages people to perform their daily prayers in congregation. Praying in congregation strengthens the ties between people by giving them the opportunity to interact with one another and discuss their issues in a religious compound.

The worth which Islam places on the congregational prayers is to such a level that it is reported that once a blind man came to the Prophet Muhammad and said that no one was able to take him to the mosque to attend the congregational prayer. Prophet Muhammad told him to stretch a thread from his house to the mosque to assist him in going to the mosque to attend the congregational prayer.

Another spiritual act which has many social aspects is fasting. The keeping away of food and water for the entire day causes Muslims to feel the pains of starvation, the agony of the poor and the deprived in society, and encourages the fortunate ones to extend their hands in help towards the indigent.

The Hajj undoubtedly is the largest religious and social convention that congregates millions of people from around the globe to one arena in order to strengthen their ties, develop their skills, and exchange ideas and opinions as to how to improve their situations.

Khums and *zakat (*charity*)* also plays an important social role in Islam. The giving of *khums* and *zakat* holds Muslims responsible

in bridging the gap between the rich and the poor, as well as sharing in the wealth that God has provided them with for the needy and disadvantaged of society.

Enjoining the good and forbidding the evil is a social duty that falls on the shoulders of each and every individual in an Islamic society - to promote goodness, kindness, peace and justice, and to fight oppression, corruption, and evil.

Therefore Islam, in practice, is truly a social religion.

Marriage and Family Life

Another aspect of Islamic social life is marriage and the establishment of a family. Islam encourages its followers to get married and avoid celibacy. Prophet Muhammad said, *"A person who marries safeguards half of his faith; then he must fear God for the remaining half."*[92] In another tradition, the Prophet said, *"He who wishes to be clean and purified when he meets God should marry and have a spouse."*[93]

The Quran describes the union between a man and woman in the following manner, *"And among His signs is that He created for you spouses from among yourselves that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your hearts. Verily, in that are signs for those who reflect." (30:21)*

This verse establishes three pillars of a successful marriage. First, marriage provides an emotional and social shelter whereby the husband and wife find stability and security - financial, spiritual, emotional, and social. The second pillar of a successful marriage is the love between the spouses. Marriage that is not based on

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[92] *Al-Kafi*, v.5 p.328.

[93] *Man'la Yahduruhu al-Faqih*, v.3 p.385.

love is apt to fail. The third pillar is the mercy between the spouses which leads to mutual understanding, appreciation, respect, forgiveness, and the caring for one another.

Although heavily discouraged, divorce is permissible in Islam. Divorce in Islam is only used in dire cases in which the marriage had no possibility of progress or development. God does not want a couple to remain in misery and sustain emotional, physical, and financial damage. Thus, God explains the laws and rules of divorce in a chapter of the Quran called "The Divorce," *"O Prophet! When you divorce women, divorce them at [the conclusion of] their term and calculate the term, and be wary of God, your Lord. Do not turn them out from their houses, nor shall they go out, unless they commit a gross indecency. These are God's bounds, and whoever transgresses the bounds of God certainly wrongs himself. You never know maybe God will bring off something new later on. Then, when they have completed their term, either retain them honourably or separate from them honourably, and take the witness of two fair men from among yourselves, and bear witness for the sake of God. To [comply with] this is advised whoever believes in God and the Last Day..." (65:1-2)*

Islam encourages reconciliation between the spouses, and the families and friends have a responsibility to counsel the couple as much as possible, as the Quran says, *"And if you fear a split between the two of them, then appoint an arbiter from his relatives and an arbiter from her relatives. If they desire reconcilement, God shall reconcile them. Indeed God is all-knowing, all-aware." (4:35)* But if the attempt to save the marriage ultimately fails, then the last resort is divorce.

After divorce, there is a waiting period which is referred to as an *iddah*. The *iddah* represents a time of reflection or emotional recuperation for the couple; it provides them an opportunity to heavily reconsider their divorce decision and can be somewhat

regarded as a period of 'separation' during which time reconciliation is possible without having to renew the marriage vows. The three-month waiting period also provides ample time to confirm the possibility of pregnancy. Often times, couples will return to each other during the *iddah* period; however, if the period elapses and the couple shows no interest of getting back together then the divorce is finalized.

Part of the Islamic social life is to have high regards for kinship. Kindness and respect for one's parents is considered as one of the most notable qualities in Islam, as God states in the Quran, *"The Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him, and that you be kind to your parents, whether one or both of them attains old age in your life. Say not to them a word of contempt nor repel them, but address them in terms of honor, and out of kindness lower to them the wing of humility and say, 'My Lord, bestow on them Your mercy, as they cherished me in childhood.'" (23:24)*

Respect and kindness towards parents is as important as worship itself. Imam as-Sadiq said, *"One who glares at his parents with wrathful eyes, although they have been unjust to him, God will not accept his prayers unless he repents."*[95]

Respecting one's mother is particularly important and the Prophet Muhammad has said, *"Treat your mother kindly. Treat your mother kindly. Treat your mother kindly, and be kind to your father."*[96]

Imam as-Sadiq has narrated, *"He who wishes God, Almighty and Glorious, to lighten the agonies of death should have regard for his kinship and treat his parents with goodness. Then God will make the*

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[95] *Usul al-Kafi*, 2:349.
[96] Ibid., 2:162.

agonies of death easy for him, and he will not be stricken by poverty in his life at all."[97]

In general, mankind should serve one another whether they are related or not. Prophet Muhammad said, *"He who decreases a grief out of the agonies for his Muslim brother, God will decrease for him a grief from the agonies of the hereafter."*[98]

He also said, *"People are the dependants of God for sustenance. So the most beloved person with God is the one who is helpful to the dependents of God and makes the family members of a house happy."*[99]

As a social responsibility, Islam also encourages its followers to help the needy. Imam as-Sadiq said, *"Whoever satiates a hungry believer such that one is satisfied fully, neither a human being among people, nor a near-stationed angel, nor a divine messenger, will know how great his reward is in the Hereafter except Allah, the Lord of the Worlds."*

The same Imam has also said: *"Feeding a hungry Muslim is among the means of forgiveness."*[100]

Even people who are not indigent should still be assisted in any possible way.

Women in Islam

It is often stated that Islam considers women to be in a relatively lower position of a human being than men, and many times we hear that the Prophet Muhammad has been reputed as being "anti-women." However, upon an in-depth examination of the

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[97] *Safinat al-Bihar*, v.2 p.553.
[98] *Shahab al-Akbar*, p.194.
[99] *Usul al-Kafi*, v.2 p.164.
[100] Ibid., v.2 p.201.

Quran and the sayings and practices of the Prophet, one finds this to be a disingenuous accusation.

The Prophet was greatly aware about the rights of women and spoke about their lofty status. In fact, he fought actively to respond to them through legislation, and private and public practice.

An entire chapter of the Quran entitled "The Women" discusses a woman's spirituality, in addition to her domestic and social rights. The chapter begins with, "*O mankind! Be dutiful to your Lord Who created you from a single soul, and He created its mate out of it, and from them both He created many men and women." (4:1)*

Oftentimes, Islam has been depicted and judged by the misconduct of some Muslims, rather than by the content and philosophy of its teachings.

Islam equalizes men and women in their creation, religious obligations, honor, and dignity. Islam has recognized women as an integral part of life, however it also recognizes that there are natural differences in the peculiarities of each gender hence they require varying guidelines of life. The female, as a mother, differs in her personality than that of the man, as a father, and thus for each gender, there is a specified message of life.

Islam innovated social and individual rights for women, and respectively, has accredited women as full partners in life. She is entitled to pursue an education and no career is closed to her, unless it interferes with their dignity, respect, and chastity in society. Islam enables a woman to own and dispose of her property without the consent of her father or husband or any other male family member. She is able to contract and manage her own business affairs, as well as to earn and manage her own

money, and Islam entitles her to an inheritance as a mother, daughter, sister, and wife!

Muslim women have the full right to choose their own husbands without pressure or intimidation and an ‘arranged marriage’ - one which is carried out without the tacit consent or acknowledgment of the woman is unlawful in Islam and the marriage *mahr* (gift) (which her and her husband decide upon) is solely for her.

She is entitled to vote (which is considered to be a religious duty), and to give her opinion or opposition in issues. The Quran states, *“O Prophet! When believing women come to you to give you political and religious allegiance ... then accept their allegiance...” (60:12)*

Her penalty in a civil offense is the same as a man’s and if she is harmed, she is entitled to just compensation.

The following are verses from the Quran that illustrate women’s rights in society:

> *There is a share for men and a share for women from what is left by parents and those nearest related, whether the property be small or large, a legal share. (4:7)*
>
> *O You who believe, you are forbidden to inherit women against their will, and you should not treat them with harshness, rather, live with them honorably. If you dislike them, it may be that you dislike a thing and that Allah brings through it a great deal of good. (4:19)*
>
> *For men there is reward for what they have earned, and for women there is reward for what they have earned. (4:32)*

> *Whoever performs righteous acts, whether male or female, while he or she is a true believer, verily to him We will give a good life in this world, with respect, contentment, and lawful provision, and We shall certainly pay them a reward in proportion to the best of what they used to do.(16:97)*

Islam requires men and women to be conservative in their attire and behavior. However, the attire for men and women varies. Islam does not permit women to display and flaunt their physical beauty in society. Muslim women when they are among other men (who they are not directly related to – through marriage or blood), are required to cover modestly. The term used for moderate covering is known as *hijab* which includes covering the contour of the body and one's hair. The only parts permitted to be left uncovered are the hands and face.[102] The *hijab* also includes the way a woman carries herself in public and thus, the 'modest covering' of Islam is not only a physical covering, but it is also an awareness of how a woman interacts with people of the opposite gender.

Covering is a form of protection, maintenance of chastity, and it avoids negative temptations in society for women and men alike. When women cover, they provide dimensions of moral character and dignity, not only for themselves, but also for the entire society. Most importantly however, it is to protect women from being victimized. It is well noted that throughout history women have been the victims of physical, mental, and emotional abuse within societies. Many societies exploit and dishonor women,

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[102] Refer to the Quran 33:53, 33:59, and 24:31.

and therefore, Islam wants to shield her honor and dignity by protecting her physical nature.

Besides protecting the honor of women, Islam wants to inculcate upon men the importance of women in the sphere of life. Men must regard women in a dignified manner and value them as human beings. The acknowledgment of a woman should not be based on her physical appearance. Rather, respect and acknowledgment must be focused on her character, her intelligence, and her moral qualities.

Human Rights in Islam

Islam has laid the fundamental and universal rights for humanity.

Essential human rights have been guaranteed and conferred by God. Such rights are an important ingredient of the human creation and honor as God says, *"And indeed we have honored the children of Adam."* (17:70)

The rights guaranteed by Islam include the right to life, justice, equality, safety, well-being, and freedom; additionally, respect for womens' honor and dignity is important.

Islam stresses that mankind originated from Adam and Eve; therefore, race, color, and ethnicity are not factors for social privileges or extended rights, and it is for this reason that Imam Ali has been reported as saying, *"Know that people are of two types: they are either your brothers in religion or your equals in creation."*[103]

Every person is entitled to respect and equal opportunity, and an integral part of the Islamic faith is to recognize, accept, and

[103] Nahj al-Balagha, sermon #53.

practice the rights of mankind, and to do otherwise, is considered to be an injustice. The verdict in the Quran is unequivocal for those who fail to do so as it states, *"Those who do not judge by what Allah has sent down are the disbelievers." (5:44)*

Human life is sacred and cannot be taken without justification. Once the sanctity of the human soul is violated by a killing, then in the words of God, *the sanctity of all mankind would have been violated.* God states, *"Whoso slay a soul not to retaliate for soul slain, nor for corruption done in the land, it would be as if he has slain all of mankind." (5:32)* Islam, in all cases, protects and defends the life of infants, children, and elderly people.

Islam considers feeding the hungry, clothing the needy, sheltering the homeless, taking care of orphans, and treating the sick and wounded, regardless of race or color, as the essential qualities of the Islamic faith. God says, *"Do you see the one who denies the reckoning such as one who shuns the orphan and does not encourage the feeding of the poor. So woe to the worshippers who do not pray with their hearts, but only wish to be seen, and deny aid (to others)." (107: 1-7)*

The Islamic teachings are replete with examples of human rights – the below are just some of them:

The sanctity of people's lives and property

The Prophet said, *"Your lives and properties are forbidden [from violation] for one another until you meet your Lord on the Day of Resurrection."*

Freedom of expression

Every individual is privileged with the right to freedom of thought and expression. However, freedom should not be

exploited in disseminating mischief or agony within the society. Therefore, freedom of expression is not extended to those who use abusive and offensive language. Islam puts great emphasis on protecting the dignity and reputation of other people as the Quran states, *"And indeed We have honored the children of Adam." (17:17)*

Personal freedom

An individual is considered innocent until a legitimate court proves one to be guilty; and one is assumed truthful in speech and deeds until proven otherwise. No individual or group should be punished for the crime committed by another individual and in this regards, the Quran states, *"Nor can one who bears burdens bear the burden of another." (35:18)*

Political activism

The Quran instructs believers not to sit idle in face of injustice, corruption, evildoers, and oppressors. God says, *"And incline not toward those who do wrong, lest the fire should touch you." (11:113)*

Prophet Muhammad has stated, *"Whoever offers help to an oppressor in his oppression will come on the Day of Reckoning with the writing on his forehead that: despaired from God's mercy."*[104]

Islam also encourages people to defy tyranny and the Quran states, *"Allah does not love evil talk in public, unless it is by someone who has been injured thereby."* (4:148)

[104] Kanz al-Ummal, saying 14,950.

Religious freedom

Religion, ideology, and philosophy should not be imposed on an individual against their will as the famous verse of the Quran states, *"Let there be no coercion in faith, truly the right way has been clearly distinct from error."* (2:256) Followers of all religions and sects have the right to worship and conduct their religious rites in an uninhibited atmosphere. Prophet Muhammad said this about the non-Muslim citizens in a Muslim state, *"One who kills a man under covenant will never smell the fragrance of Paradise."*

Right to a standard means of living

All of mankind has an equal right for aid and assistance for the basic necessities in life, such as food, drink, shelter, clothing, and medication.

This is a promise God made to the first man, *"Verily you have between [a promise from Us] that you will never be hungry therein, nor naked, and you will not suffer from thirst therein, nor from the suns heat." (20:118-119)*

The poor have an inalienable right of living upon the rich. The Quran states, *"And in their wealth there is acknowledged right for the needy and destitute."* (51:19)

Equality before the law

All citizens, regardless of social class, are equal within the law. There are no dignitaries who can go unpunished for their crimes in Islam; no one is exempted from the law.

Islamic Law and Punishment

Before speaking about law and punishment in Islam, some premises must be introduced regarding Islamic jurisprudence.

Islamic ideology stipulates that God is the main source of 'religious' and 'secular' law. These laws were revealed to all of the Divinely sent messengers in different eras and geographical places, according to the intellectual progress of the various societies.

Thus, upon the coming of the Quran, God's laws were culminated as the universal legislation to guide mankind. Therefore, Islamic law is not only bound by time or place, the laws are designed to cater to the different needs of humanity until the end of time.

The Islamic law of punishment is based on prevention, not retribution. Islam seeks to prevent criminal acts before they happen in order to maintain the peace of society. These laws are dynamic in that they are everlasting and are not bound by individualistic interests, and the laws of Islam take into consideration the general interest of society. God speaks about the punishment of criminals by saying, *"O you who believe, the law of equality in punishment is prescribed for you in case of murder, but if the killer is forgiven by the relatives of the killed against blood money, then adhering to it with fairness and payment of the blood money to the heir should be made in fairness. This is alleviation and a mercy from your Lord"* (2:178).

Islam tries to combat crime and terror actively; however, it leaves room for mercy and forgiveness, emphasizing the human nature of people to commit unlawful acts. Islam teaches its followers to learn mercy and forgiveness from their Lord.

Islamic law is subject to the inherited rights of life. In order for the Islamic law to be judged and administered properly, all aspects (rights) of life have to be available for people as a whole in order for the judicial system to be incorporated.

Islam commands societies and individuals alike to promote social justice, equality, and to maintain distribution of wealth, and thus, Islamic rule can only be applied when a society has adequate food, shelter, clothing, and employment. Furthermore, Islamic rule is only possible if an equal opportunity for education is possible. It is also important for matrimony to be possible. The Islamic system of governance endeavors to bridge the gap between the haves and have-nots and only when these orders are in place does Islam then stand firmly against any person who attempts to terrorize or jeopardize the safety and security of society.

The Mosque (Masjid)

The mosque is a place of worship used by Muslims. Islam encourages people to perform their prayers in the mosque and also encourages its adherents to help participate in the building of mosques.

Prophet Muhammad said, "*Whoever builds a mosque, Allah will build for him a house in Paradise.*" Mosques play a vital role in Muslim life, as in addition to the five daily congregational prayers and the recommended prayers, the mosque also accommodates Muslims during the Friday noon prayers and on the *eid*[105] holidays. Mosques are considered sacred places; men and women who are ritually impure may not enter them until they have

[105] Eid literally means 'celebration' and for the Muslims, it refers to a religious holiday, in particular, a Muslim holiday. Muslims have two major days of celebration (Eid): Eid al-Fitr, which is the celebration to close the period of fasting during the Month of Ramadan, and Eid al-Adha, celebration of the sacrifice which relates to the trial which Prophet Abraham was put through in which he was ordered by God to sacrifice his first born son, Ishmael.

ritually cleansed themselves. In addition, mosques should not be sold or defiled. The Quran states, *"The mosques of Allah shall be maintained only by those who believe in Allah and the last day, perform prayers, give zakat and fear none but Allah. It is they who surely are on true guidance." (9:18)*

The first mosque built by Prophet Muhammad (when he migrated from Mecca to Madina) was called the *Mosque of Qubah*. It is located on the outskirts of the city of Madina. However, the holiest of all mosques and the first house of worship that was built on the earth is *al-Masjid al-Haram*, the sacred mosque in Mecca [Kabah]. The second holiest mosque is the Prophet's Mosque (in Madina) which was built after the Prophet's migration from Mecca to Madina.

Mosques have many distinctive features. There is the *musallah* (prayer hall), the *minbar* (pulpit where the preacher (or imam) stands to deliver the sermon), and the *mihrab* (the niche that faces the direction of the Kabah in Mecca, *al-qiblah*).

Even though the presence of God is everywhere, the Quran states, *"To Allah belong the East and the West, so wherever you turn your face there is the face of Allah." (2:115)* Nevertheless, as a sign of unity, Muslims are instructed to face the *qiblah* (the direction of the Kabah in Mecca) during the prayers. Mosques also have domes and minarets from which, in countries with a majority of Muslims, the call to prayer is announced daily.

Before a person enters a mosque, ones' shoes must be removed, and women should be dressed modestly *(hijab)*. Neither men nor women should speak loudly while inside.

Mosques belong to God - not to specific individuals, families, communities, or tribes as the Quran states, *"And the mosques are for Allah alone, so invoke not anyone along with Allah." (72:18)* Hence,

barring people from conducting their worship in a mosque is considered a grave sin in Islam. The Quran states, "*And who is more unjust than those who forbid that Allah's name be glorified and mentioned much in Allah's mosques and strive for their ruin?*" (2:114)

EPILOGUE

There are other issues related to Islamic beliefs and rituals that I intentionally refrained from mentioning throughout this book. The reason being is that my primary focus was to be brief and comprehensible.

However, the core of Islam, as the reader may have noticed, is four-dimensional. It includes the attitude and behavior of a Muslim towards oneself, God the Almighty, the family and community, and the environment. Prophet Muhammad summarized the meaning of religion in a single word - *comportment.*

Behavior and belief during one's lifetime will determine ones' fate on the Day of Judgment.

With these words of conclusion, I hope and pray that God the Almighty may guide us all along the right path. It is only through His path that one is insured success, prosperity, and peace in this life and in the Hereafter, God Willing.

GLOSSARY

Adhaan: a call for prayer

Adl: justice

Al-Fatiha: The opening chapter of the Quran

Aslama: Surrendered

Asr: Afternoon

Barzakh: The universe that separates death from the Day of Resurrection

Bint: Daughter

Fajr: Dawn

Fitra: Natural disposition

Hajj: Pilgrimage to Mecca

Hijrah: Migration of the Prophet from Mecca to Madina

Ibn: Son

Iddah: Waiting period for a woman after divorce

Iqaama: The announcement for the beginning of the prayer

Imamah: Leadership after the Prophet

Imam(s) : Successor(s) to the Prophet

Isha: Night prayers

Jabr: Compulsion

Jenaba: State of sexual impurity

Jihad: To strive

Ka'bah: House of Allah in Mecca

Khalifa: Vicegerent

Khums: Religious taxes on wealth

Maghrib: Sunset

Masjid: Mosque

Mumin: Believer

Nubuwwa: Prophethood

Qiblah: Direction to Mecca

Rakat: Unit of prayers

Sadaqa: Charity

Salaat: Prayers

Sawm: Fast

Shura: Consultation

Sujud: Prostration

Taahir: Clean

Tafwid: Free will

Tawaf: Circumambulation

Tawhid: Monotheism

Dhur: Noon

Wudhu: Ablution

Zakat: Islamic tax

OTHER BOOKS BY SAYED MOUSTAFA AL-QAZWINI

Inquiries About Shia Islam: Attempts to bridge the gap between the Islamic schools of thought by clarifying common misconceptions about Shia Islam and explaining philosophies and practices specific to the Shia school of thought. These issues are discussed primarily in the light of the Holy Quran and the traditions of the Holy Prophet as related in the books of hadith.

Women: A New Perspective: A dialogue that discusses and expounds the various issues regarding the rights and laws that pertain to women in Islam, and unwraps some of the distorted images and misconceptions that surround Muslim women. Co-authored and discussed with a Muslim woman - Fatma Saleh.